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Ethnicity and the Politics of Revolution in Myanmar: The Fate of the Arakan Army

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ABSTRACT

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This article argues that because of the unresolved conflict between the state and ethnic groups that have existed in Myanmar since its independence, the country has been mired in a constant struggle between the majority Bamar population and ethnic minorities, which has led to the emergence of a plethora of peace processes whose efficacy is shaky at best. These tensions have endured for decades, and political elites have consistently played a significant role in raising identity issues to construct nationalism. However, nothing has been accomplished. This argument is supported by the nature of the peace process that government regimes have, at times, implemented to settle ethnic strife with the Arakan Army (AA) in Myanmar. The primary objective of this study is to examine the factors that impeded the peace process after 2011 and to identify how these influenced the behavior of the AA, especially in the wake of the latest coup in 2021. A qualitative research approach was used for this study because it congruously handled the research areas. The paper, within the framework of the British colonial strategy of "divide and rule," suggests that history has exacerbated ethnic animosity in Myanmar. Hence, political elites found it impossible to engage all ethnic groups in the nation-building effort. The nation's efforts to integrate minorities were thwarted following Aung San's death, culminating in decades of ethnic unrest. The paper also considers the political atmosphere of each administration, and the prospects for

peace negotiations with the AA after the military coup in 2021.

Introduction

Since the scent of freedom began to permeate the air in Myanmar, the underlying tension, which mirrors the country's political environment, has fluctuated in response to the shifting power-sharing stance among the actors in the country. Throughout history, the relationships among the affluent Bamar majority, the Tatmadaw,¹ The civilian government officials who wanted a modicum of power and the armed groups demanding independence have altered. Moreover, this has ultimately reshaped the fate of the country. Because of the British colonial strategy of "divide and rule," which exacerbated ethnic animosity in Myanmar, political elites faced a long-standing problem in including all ethnic groups in the emergence of nationalism in the state (Stokke et al., 2018). Since Myanmar's independence in 1948, ethnic tensions have posed a significant hurdle to the nation's democratic unification. National fissures have gradually attracted much attention and spawned numerous armed factions active in the independence movement. The study probes the conspicuous dynamics in the peace process that has emerged since 2010 with Arakan armed groups. The article sets out to conduct a regime-by-regime investigation of the peace process since the General Election of 2010 to better grasp its political essence.

The study's primary objective is to assess the environment of the peace process conducted by various governments and how it affects the behavior of revolutionary armed groups. Examining the case of the AA's resistance against various governments in Myanmar from 2011 until the 2021 coup, the study seeks to answer the question, what role does the unresolved conflict between the state and ethnic groups play in shaping the dynamics of revolution and the pursuit of political objectives? How can the AA develop a strategy and modify their revolutionary efforts by examining the peace processes to deal with the challenges the military administration poses? It is argued that the peace process, in its rudimentary form, may appear to be an effort to establish deeper ties between ethnic groups and the government. However, its ability to fulfill this commitment is dubious in the long run. In other lexical items, this paper suggests that a good peace agreement with the government of Myanmar reflects the developments visible in the

¹"Tatmadaw" is a Burmese word that means "military forces." However, this name is now emblematic of the current military junta because of its enormous dominance within Myanmar and national and international notoriety. The Tatmadaw's origins can be traced back to the establishment of the Burma Independence Army (BIA) in 1941. Aung San, considered the Father of the Nation, was also a member of BIA. Before Burma gained independence, the assassination of Aung San in 1948 shifted the entire political arithmetic. However, even before his assassination, the BIA had begun to unite with other militia to form a nationwide military force. After the country gained its independence, the Tatmadaw, as it is now recognized, was formed.

patterns of power protection frameworks of the century of colonization, which are based on the regime's short-term interests in maintaining power and, as a result, have very seldom demonstrated actual effectiveness. To support this assumption, the paper employs a qualitative methodology. By drawing on the work of other authors who have explored the problems of Myanmar's political turbulence and its potential effects on the peace process, qualitative research provides an opportunity to advance the study's unique interpretation. This will allow for a broad comprehension of the various settings. Secondary data was gathered from published books, newspapers, periodicals, journals, scholarly blogs, and so on. Significant issues in amassing data include relations and power imbalances in domestic politics, internal security qualms of political regimes, external impacts, regional balance from varying viewpoints, etc. This study is well-suited to the qualitative research approach since it allows the researcher to supplement interpretations with evidence from various sources. Consequently, a broad comprehension of the particular circumstances is anticipated from the approach.

This article contends that following the 2010 election, the social movement of Arakan armed groups has altered due to the process of denial by various political elites. The country's political elite could not promote the required measures to include Arakan as an ethnic minority in forming nationalism. As a result, they instigated ethnic division to gain legitimacy from the majority Burmans by announcing that Burman nationalism would be supreme (Foxeus, 2019). The research will reveal how the priorities of power elites have split the state and how negotiated policies have worsened tensions between ethnic armed groups of Arakan and the government. The article will explore Myanmar's political climate by referring to the divide-and-rule policy dating back to the colonial era.

The article is in six sections, with the introduction and conclusion being the first and last. A theoretical framework is developed in section three, following a brief overview of political history in the second segment, to understand better how political elites shape society and contribute to developing a negotiating framework. Using a two-phase approach, section four addresses how the politics of elites and the nationalist approach were taken by two significant regimes after 2010 and continued the divided society, taking the Arakan Armed (AA) group into account. The fifth section indicates whether or not these negotiations will suffer a reversal due to the recent coup and, if so, what the underlying factors are. The sixth chapter has a conclusion with a few final notes.

Chronicle of Politics in Brief

After colonialism, many post-colonial states had their political realms shaped by colonists

who were insensitive to the subtle nuances of patriotism among their citizens. Frustration looms large over Myanmar's political challenges, mostly framed as struggles over competing notions of ethnic rights. Myanmar's scenario reveals how each administration attempted to resolve ethnic heterogeneity under the pretense of national identity. In 1935, for the first time, a constitutional provision published by the British colonial power defined the territory of the Burman state as embodied in the Government of Burma Act (Taylor, 2009). However, once the independence movement in Myanmar began, the Bamar people espoused the ideology of a Burmese nation and ethnic minorities were deemed a threat to their identity (Smith, 2003). Moreover, it can be argued that the seeds of frustration between Bamar and the ethnic minorities have been cultivated in the political soil of Burma since that time. Indeed, the historical narrative suggests that relations were not harmonious throughout the British era (Furnivall, 1953), leaving room for further study. Myanmar was a loosely federated kingdom before British colonialism, and there was no concept of the Burmese nation or state of Burma. In both political and economic terms, the British colonization of Burma was a catastrophe, as profit-making was the driving force behind British control in Burma. As the British had little interest in what was happening in the country's public arena, the racial disparities within the country widened. As a result, religious identity gained prominence and, over time, began to play a substantial role in the national political sphere. When focusing on the social fabric of the ethnic nationalities in Myanmar, the hypothesis that has been proposed is that Myanmar has always been fond of establishing a nation based on religious identity (Taylor, 2005).

The 2010 national election was the first step in Myanmar's demilitarization process. Myanmar hopes for reforms in the shadow of the country's first civilian government in twenty years, and these expectations were not entirely unfounded. There were many opportunities for Thein Sein² To work with for decades. Thein Sein and the new parliament became involved in a power struggle, particularly by strengthening democratic accountability in Myanmar, which has been lauded internationally (Wilson, 2017). Thein Sein took various steps to integrate the ethnically divided society. Despite apparent parallels with previous military dictatorships, the West admired the new approach to governance and the numerous attempts to launch a reconciliation process with ethnic groups (Taylor, 2012). Thein Sein administration attempted to reach an agreement with armed groups, notably the Kachin Independence Army, the Shan State Army - South, the Karen National Union, the Chin National Front, and the New Mon State Party, through

²President Thein Sein entered office in 2011, following the country's first general election in 20 years, in November 2010. Since then, he has been at the forefront of reform in Myanmar, which is dominated by a military regime of which he was a crucial member.

an officially recognized peace process (Taylor, 2012). However, analyzing the present situation, there are doubts today about how many of those attempts were successful or whether the administration was genuinely able to demonstrate its commitment or trust through peace negotiations. In fact, the agreements reached were not ceasefires in the strict sense of the term since they did not cover the entire state; for example, the United Wa State Army has mostly stood on the touchline of the talks, whereas the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), which monitors vast sections of northeastern Kachin state, was still embroiled in a dispute with the Burmese army after the ceasefire was broken in 2011 ("Myanmar signs peace", 2015). Indeed, even after voicing a message of hope, the peace talks eventually lost momentum in the long term.

The Saffron Revolution emboldened the Buddhist monks and was one of the significant reasons why democracy emerged (Steinberg, 2008). Aung San Suu Kyi came to power as a result. Apart from constitutional reforms, the NLD is in complete control of parliament and the government following its resounding win in the general election 2015. However, 25 percent of seats in parliament are allocated to the military, together with the three security-related ministries (Sun, 2014). However, the government was determined to continue the peace process with a more robust framework. The divisions within the armed ethnic communities and the blind eye that Suu Kyi turned to offensive acts carried out by the military also placed a stumbling block in the way of a successful peace process. The societal divisions have given rise to a slew of ethnic military groups and political elites tinkering with the future. There is still no framework for an efficacious peace process. Previous research in this field did not adequately investigate how the peace process will progress in light of the political changes. Prior research has largely ignored the AA in favor of examining the revolutionary patterns of other groups. The following section will delve into the historical setting of the colonial epoch, where the seeds of a divided society were planted in the political culture.

Divide and Rule Policy": A Frame to Understand the Political Plotline

Nationalist movements were the greatest threat to the British colonial endeavor and intention to secure the social order back home, and they could immediately neutralize their authority in colonies, for example, the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857. The British feared anything with a majoritarian prospect that could revolt against their rule in colonies. Thus, the British deployed a "divide and rule policy" leading to structure-induced disorientation to eliminate nationalist zeal. They forbade the integration of majorities in various social and political contexts. This study leans on the "divide and rule policy" as a theoretical framework to assume that the political elites in

independent Burma inherited the British “divide and rule” policy, which has shaped the dynamics of ethnic movements and violence in Myanmar over the years.

Buddhist Burmans have a prejudice from the colonial period that they would be mistreated, their cultural values would be disrespected, and their sovereignty would be dismissed if minorities were empowered and took over important positions in government. Consequently, the elites have perpetrated exploitative stratagems through the creation of a thick line of social division with underdevelopment, illiteracy, and human rights abuses. Political elites have used the historical insecurities of the majority to justify their authoritarian rule.

In his book *"Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know,"* David Steinberg (2008) connects Myanmar's colonial past to its presently functioning political realities with an analysis of the regime to predict a cure for the country's endless ills. Steinberg notes Tatmadaw's assertion that the British “divide and rule” policy catalyzed mistrust and enmity between majority Burmans and minority ethnic communities (Steinberg, 2008). He describes the “divide and rule” policy as the Indian way of control (Steinberg, 2008). He illustrates the execution of the “divide and rule” policy in Myanmar, where the Burman culture and their positions in government were disregarded. British rulers recruited bureaucrats from India and promoted English as the official language. Later, Burma was separated from India, and the Burma Civil Service was introduced. The policy of “divide and rule” empowered minority groups with the education of minorities and was initiated by the establishment of Kanbawza College (a princely school for the sons of local Shan rulers) in the Shan State. As Burmans were an obvious threat to the British rule, the author illustrates the demographics of the Burmese army where the minorities dominated, with Karenni (27.8 percent), Chin (22.6 percent), Kachin (22.9 percent), and Burman (12.3 percent).

Myint and Tun (2016) chronicle how the British exerted their authority in Burma in Chapter 9 of their book, *"The Making of Burma."* British filled the Burmese administration with Indian officials, and the new administration wholly transformed the culture and symbols of the traditional Burmese state authority (Myint & Tun, 2016). The British colonizers eliminated state sponsorship of Buddhism and the long-established Buddhist Sangha. The prevalence of the “divide and rule” policy is discerned from Than Myint's narration. Taylor (2007) depicts the British disgust for the majority Burmese people's devotion to Buddhism and the military might of the Konbaung armies. The British dismissed Buddhism as the state religion and weakened the very disciplined hierarchy of the Buddhist Sangha following the obliteration of the Burmese monarchy (Taylor, 2007). The British feared the Burmans and their Theravada Buddhism could unite people and have the power to enforce change. Hence, they endorsed Christianity and Christian missionaries and even Islam but restricted the influence of Buddhism by undermining the traditional role of the Buddhist

'Sangha' in society and education (Taylor, 2007).

Steinberg (2008) notes the grievances of the majority of Burmans against the minority groups following Myanmar's independence. Aung San worked only for equal minority rights in social and political spheres as part of the Panglong Agreement (Steinberg, 2013). The president of the Union of Myanmar was elected under an ethnic rotation system (Steinberg, 2013). The country's first president was a Shan, followed by a Burman and a Karen. However, the constitution stipulated that the president must be a Buddhist. The federal government made little effort to protect indigenous culture. Each minority had its own government and got representation in a separate bicameral legislature. However, the minorities continued to complain about the central government's denial of sufficient resources to the minority governments. Steinberg writes that after 1948, Burma gained independence, not unity, as some scholars have argued.

In his paper, "The Re-ethnicization of Politics in Myanmar and the Making of the Rohingya Ethnicity Paradox," Hein (2018) uses Brass's framework on the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India to explain the collective violence in Myanmar. Brass merged instrumentalist and constructivist postulations and put ethnic identities framed by elites to be employed in a religious or ethnic conflict, removing them from significant political and economic debates (Hein, 2018). Hein cites Jones (2014), who posits that by generating communal hatred between the majority of Burmans and minority groups, the military government of Myanmar has successfully contained ethnic separatist threats and garrisoned its economic interests (Hein, 2018). Hein refers to Colletta and his friends and shows how the British facilitated Indian and Chinese migration and hampered Burman's societal development and prospects.

Myanmar's political elites inherited the British idea of a nation that is defined by a race, which stimulated the rise of ethnicization of the majority Burmans (Hein, 2018). The writer identifies four factors that sustained the social division and violence in Myanmar: (1) the legacy of ethnic division originating from the British colonial rule, (2) the institutionalization of ethnicity, exemplified by the census of 1973, the 1982 citizenship law, and the 1989 ethnicity based national ID cards, (3) promotion of Buddhism in nation-building by the military, and (4) competition between military and civilian elites regarding political control which triggered the 2015 race laws. Moreover, in 2015, opposition parties like the NLD purged several ethnic minority leaders.

It is assumed that the peace process between the government and ethnic rebel groups, which Thein Sein started, is not stable because the government and the elites have been using the negotiations as the continuation of the policy of "divide and rule."

Exploring the Regime-by-Regime Political Climate

A key player in the establishment of Myanmar's multi-ethnic and multi-religious nationalism was General Aung San who advocated for a clear distinction between politics and religion: "Politics and religion must be clearly separated since they are not the same thing. We hurt the religion itself if we mix religion with politics" (cited in Smith, 2019, p. 33). However, his dream was shattered with his death. After that, the country's first prime minister, U Nu, drove the country away from secular nationalism and toward Buddhist nationalism while promoting democratic norms. The U Nu administration convened the Sixth Great Buddhist Council from 1954 to 1956, when it decided to close all non-Buddhist schools (Fairbairn, 1956). The 1962 Printers and Publishers Regulation Law, followed by the 1965 Censor Law, was introduced by the new government after the military takeover led by General Ne Win (Silverstein, 1966). Other non-Bamar minorities were subjected to these regulations, which mandated that everyone learn Burmese (Silverstein, 1966). These initiatives sought to foster unity among citizens by addressing religious and cultural homogeneity issues. However, they did not all pitch in to create a nation with one voice.

However, under Thein Sein, some significant changes began to take place, and Aung San Suu Kyi was ultimately responsible for moving things forward. The following subsection will examine how the peace discussions of the Arakan armed groups progressed under the two regimes from 2010 through 2021.

Re-integration under Thein Sein

In August 1961, U Nu announced the formation of a commission regarding the statehood of the Arakanese and Mon (Trager, 1963). There was no opposition to the formation of a state for the Arakanese because the majority of the Arakanese were Buddhists, and were close to Burmans (Trager, 1963). Nevertheless, the central government notably opposed the Arakanese acquiring statehood, pointing to fears of national disintegration and secession movements. The 1962 military coup expunged any hope of statehood for the minorities, including the Arakanese, for good. Under the 1974 constitution, when Rakhine state was created, the conditions for the Muslim Rohingya were humiliating. The Rohingya formed the Rohingya Patriotic Front, which resulted in a massive backlash from the Tatmadaw, and several Rohingya took refuge in Bangladesh (Trager, 1963).

Concerns regarding Rakhine are twofold, with its repercussions on international and

domestic politics. Myanmar's political elite likes to portray the conflict in the Rakhine state as merely a conflict between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingya. However, the conflict is a struggle for the self-determination of the Arakanese (the majority of the Arakanese are Theravada Buddhists) with the Myanmar government (Brent, 2019). The AA is considered one of the key active ethnic rebel groups in Myanmar (Mathieson, 2020) or the leading rebel group fighting the Tatmadaw for Arakan autonomy (Brent, 2019). China is the only foreign power with influence over the AA (Mathieson, 2020). The Arakan armed movements (including the movement of Muslim Rohingya) have been persistent with many different manifestations from 1942 to now (Smith, 2019).

In 2011, Thein Sein introduced a reform agenda for democratic transition in Myanmar. The democratic transition was a military-civilian mixed-breed version of government rather than a fully democratic one (Sobey & Brandon, 2017). Moreover, the agenda for democratic transition stimulated peace negotiations with Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) (Sobey & Brandon, 2017). In 2013, 16 EAOs formed an alliance called the Nationwide Ceasefire Coordination Team (NCCT) to deal with the Myanmar peace negotiation organization, UPWC. The AA, Arakan National Council, and Arakan Liberation Party were the organizations that joined the NCCT to represent the Arakanese. In 2015, the NCCT and UPWC signed the final draft of the NCA (Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement) (Sobey & Brandon, 2017).

After the November 2010 elections, Myanmar was under a government led by Thein Sein, who enacted significant changes. Despite its evident cohesion with the former military dictatorship, the government adopted a new way of governance. This section focuses on the peace efforts of Thein Sein's government.

Rakhine (Arakan) state is said to be "Myanmar's Gateway to the West" and one of the most significant strategic crossroads in Asia (Mohajan, 2018). The 1947 constitution recognized four ethnic nationalities: Kachin, Karen, Karenni, and Shan, whereas the nationalities of Rakhine, Kokang, Mon, Pa-O, Palaung, and Wa did not receive any such constitutional status (Walton, 2008). The Arakanese faced conflict and violence immediately after the independence of Burma in March 1947 (Walton, 2008). As the Arakanese were part of British Ministerial Burma, they were excluded from the Panglong Agreement. Previously, the Arakanese allied with the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) but raised concerns about Burman members' ability to represent their interests. Thus, the Arakanese people cut ties with the AFPFL and formed their own organization. The conflicts between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingyas internally fragmented the Arakanese community. It is to be noted that the Burmese government and the Buddhist Arakanese historically disdain the Muslim Rohingyas. Internal divisions undermined the Arakanese people's demands for ethnic equality and autonomy (Ahmed, 2009).

However, in June 2015, some EAO leaders rejected the draft (Ahmed, 2009). They made further demands, including amending the final paper, reconstructing the NCCT, and adding three other ethnic rebel groups from the states of Shan and Kokang to the NCCT (Ahmed, 2009). In October 2015, the government accused six EAOs, including the AA, of fighting with the Tatmadaw and, therefore, excluded them from signing the peace agreement.

Gum San Awng (Awng et al., 2019) identified six factors that are impeding the peace process:

- 1) Disagreement between the Tatmadaw and EAOs on the proposal regarding the formation of a single Army (the disagreement persists because Tatmadaw wants immediate disarmament, demobilization, and re-integration),
- 2) Commitment to non-secession,
- 3) The different interpretations of the text by the Tatmadaw and EAOs,
- 4) The exclusion of powerful EAOs like the AA, National Democratic Alliance, and KIO from the agreement,
- 5) The existence of distrust and conflict between the EAOs and Tatmadaw,
- 6) The excuses of the Tatmadaw to eschew the national-level political dialogue.

Scholars hold that Thein Sein did not want a total democratic transition (Taylor, 2012). Thein Sein's effort was paternalistic and controlled. Moreover, the Tatmadaw tried to ensure their control of the ethnic areas by plans to subjugate the EAOs through the peace agreement (Wansai, 2016). The Tatmadaw's intention is made clear by their excuses that the Rakhine state was unstable; therefore, they kept the rebel groups of Arakan out of the national-level political dialogues. The most notable point to identify "Divide and Rule" in the peace process is that the Thein Sein government portrayed the conflict in Rakhine as communal violence between Buddhists and Muslim Rohingyas.

The Peace Process under the Government led by the National League for Democracy (NLD)

The 2015 election and Aung San Suu Kyi's accession to office as state counselor gave the country new reasons to aspire to peace between the military and ethnic groupings. To end decades of antagonism between the Tatmadaw and ethnic minorities, Aung San Suu Kyi created

new institutions and began the 21st-century Panglong negotiation.³ (also known as the Union Peace Conferences). Unfortunately, because of widespread mistrust between the ethnic stakeholders and the military's influence over the process, there has been some skepticism regarding the negotiations' prospects for success.

In 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), secured a landslide victory. The military scheduled the 2010 election under the parameters of the country's constitution, which came into force in 2008. However, the country's major opposition party, the NLD abstained from voting. After the 2015 national election, the NLD became the country's government. Suu Kyi asserted that her government's first priority would be the peace process with an all-inclusive ceasefire agreement (Zaw, 2016). Suu Kyi re-established the Myanmar Peace Center (MPC) as the National Reconciliation and Peace Restoration Center (Pwint, 2016). The NLD reformed the existing Union Peace Dialogue Joint Committee (Mathieson, 2020). The Tatmadaw excluded three rebel groups, including the AA, Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), from the first 21st Century Panglong Conference in 2016 (Martin, 2016). The three rebel groups mentioned and the Burmese Army were reported to be in conflict in remote areas in 2015 (Martin, 2016). Following the exclusion of these major EAOs, rebel groups from Shan and Kachin condemned the conference (Martin, 2016). The second 21st Century Panglong Conference took place in May 2017. The development of the second conference was the acceptance of the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA as observers of the conference, as well as the signing of an NCA between the NLD government, the Tatmadaw, and eight EAOs. Initially signed in October 2015 by the Thein Sein government, the NCA was taken over by the NLD to enhance inclusion and establish a complete ceasefire agreement. In the third conference in 2018, the Tatmadaw Deputy Commander-in-Chief urged the non-signatory EAOs who were observers at the conference (the AA, TNLA, and MNDAA) to sign the NCA (Mon, 2018). The third conference also did not reach a comprehensive conclusion with the debate between the Tatmadaw and the EAOs regarding their respective proposals for the "Republic of Burma" and "Union of Burma" (Mon, 2018). The AA has been confronting the Tatmadaw for twenty months since 2018 (Htun, 2020). In March 2020, the NLD-led government declared the AA a terrorist organization and refused to negotiate with the group (Htun, 2020). The Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and TNLA condemned the government's statement regarding the AA and boycotted the peace talks (Nyein, 2020). In the fourth conference of 2020,

³General Aung San, Burma's unifying leader, envisioned an integrated Burma and initiated negotiations among ethnic minorities to integrate them into the state of Burma by providing room for their ethnic identity. By signing the 1947 Panglong Agreement, the ethnic communities consented to an integrated Burma under his leadership.

Aung San Suu Kyi committed to a new plan for establishing a democratic federal union after the general election of 2020.

The Fate of the Arakan after the Coup d'état in 2021

Organizations must deal with a two-pronged struggle in order to move the revolution ahead. First, there is an interactive struggle (external struggle), in which conflict arises between ethnic armed organizations and the government, followed by an intra-active struggle (internal struggle), in which the dilemma is a conflict within the struggling group itself (Manski, 2019). Political shifts, such as the military's seizing control of the government, can be a major determinant of the destination of revolution. This section of the paper attempts to address the second research question. This part will cover how, following the recent coup, the armed organizations will carry out their organizational activities here.

Revolutionary groups learn how to form long-lasting, solid, and well-resourced movements in the conflict (Cox, 2014). This learning is particularly true of Myanmar's revolution against the political elites. The country's political elites could not promote the necessary steps to accommodate ethnic minorities in the formation of nationalism and instigated ethnic division to acquire legitimacy from the majority of Burmans by declaring the supremacy of Bamar nationalism. Strategies and interpretations of an approach to achieving the objective are adjusted or reassessed in response to the immediate problem or target the organization is concentrating on achieving.

The AA denounced the Burmese junta Army's takeover of Myanmar (Broome, 2021). Though the military promised to carry out peace talks to restore peace in Myanmar, the AA accused the military of killing unarmed civilians (Bociaga, 2021). Thus, the AA vowed to continue their fight against the government to protect the oppressed people of Rakhine while other parties of EAOs. It is reported that the AA has established an independent authority of its own in two-thirds of the AA-occupied Rakhine state (Hlaing, 2021). Analysts argue that the instability triggered by the military coup will result in the AA and its affiliate, the United League of Arakan, utilizing its "Way of Rakhita" philosophy to realize its "Arakanese dream" (Lynn, 2021). The Arakanese dream refers to the concept of a sovereign and independent Arakan (Lynn, 2021).

The AA's struggle for the self-determination of the Arakanese people delineates a well-organized and adequately resourced movement. The AA's movement for self-determination has a strong philosophy in the "Way of Rakhita," which has intellectually supported the group to persist in their struggle for years (Linn, 2019). The movement is well organized with the AA's alliance with other ethnic EAOs like the KIA and TNLA and a large 7-member coalition called the

Federal Political Negotiation and Consultative Committee to bargain peace deals with the government and Tatmadaw (Lynn, 2021). The natural resources of hilly Arakan and external support from a regional power like China enabled the AA to endure the backlash from the Tatmadaw over the years (Bhattacharyya, 2020). On that account, the assumption is that the ethnic armed organizations of Arakan will not compromise their autonomy in future dialogues with any military or hybrid civil-military government in Myanmar. Ultimately, the Tatmadaw's false hope for peace and an uncompromised military standoff may shift the tide from a struggle for self-determination to sovereignty (Kham, 2021).

According to recorded information, violence has changed towards direct confrontation since 2022. Arrests of military and AA personnel in western Myanmar's Rakhine state have put communities on edge, fearing that conflict between the two groups could explode once again. A surprise airstrike on a Thai border AA base by the Karen National Union junta has escalated the standoff (Chan, 2022).

Arakan armed groups have adopted a strategic take-off and have imposed a cornucopia of regulations to exercise control over the population through monitoring. It was not the epilogue of the conflict as the junta grew violent on the opposite side. Dozens of civilians were charged with the felony of involvement in the kidnapping of junta forces (Chan, 2022). This retaliation will only erode the climate for future negotiations toward a settlement. History already states that powers in Myanmar have no prowess to organize peace talks, and this notion is only growing more relevant in the case of AA groups. Agreed, it would be favorable for the junta if it could settle the situation with peaceful dialogue. However, by the time Arakan armed groups initiate an offensive in response to the junta army's aggression, there will be little space to create confidence between the negotiating parties.

Conclusion

It is crucial to create a state-functional harmony in Myanmar by mending the rifts set out by elite-played identity politics and the historical awareness of it bore by its citizens. Disillusionment permeates every level of society, from the public sphere to the political arena, due to the divide-and-rule approach instituted by the British. When the state is able to build strong relationships among its citizens by fostering a feeling of shared national identity, the perception of nationalism is simplified, and the contrary position is also much more predictable. Political elites have a significant role in fostering nationalism in post-colonial countries like Myanmar, where ethnic distinctions are embedded in representational systems. What can be seen in the

opposite situation is that the seeds of dissatisfaction among ethnic groups are germinating and leading to situational catastrophe. There is no way to deny that Myanmar society has many rifts due to its colonial past, most of which were created by the colonials to maintain their power. A strong push for freedom and a revolutionary social movement arose whenever political leaders took the initiative to create a multi-ethnic society to foster national identity.

Although the secular political elites of Myanmar under General Aung San failed to recognize all ethnic communities during the state-building phase, they did affirm the ethnic identity of four groups by signing the Panglong Agreement with them in 1947. Ethnic minorities in Myanmar felt marginalized and turned to armed conflict as a way to assert their autonomy. By the time General Ne Win took control of Myanmar's politics, many one-sided plans had begun to shape due to the military's rise as the country's dominant political organization. One of them was a campaign to enforce the Myanmar language on the entire demographic. The country was politically weakened during Ne Win's rule, and the structure became more polarized. As a result, in 1988, he was forced to cede control to another military government, the so-called SLORC. Despite their promises of a democratic transition and efforts to recognize ethnic identities, they once again split the country along ethnic lines by categorizing ethnic groups. The dictatorship rigged the 1990 elections to retake control of the country. Over the next few years, international pressure and domestic unrest led them to agree on an interim democratic roadmap in 2003 and a draft constitution the following in 2008.

In 2011, a new civilian government under Thein Sein, began a negotiating process that differed from previous negotiations regarding participation and involvement. A seat at the table for political leaders, as well as the involvement from the United Nations and China, was provided. The election of Aung San Suu Kyi as state counsellor in 2015 was a watershed moment in Myanmar's political history. The country had a new lease on life under her leadership, raising the prospect of peace between the military and ethnic minorities. To end decades of conflict between the military and ethnic minorities, Aung San Suu Kyi created new institutions and began the 21st-century Panglong negotiations. However, a culture of distrust permeated the entire constitutional process.

The AA and its allies are determining the fate of the western coast and even the northern frontiers of Myanmar. An invitation to a national peace pact in 2011 provided a glimmer of hope, albeit dim. The EAOs of Arakan were enthusiastic since there were evident distinctions between the 1989-2010 peace process and the post-2011 political settlement. The most recent dramatic coup served as a clear signal of the end of the bargaining process. Burmese identity must remain supreme, and the military must be seen as the single arbiter of national identity. On the other

hand, the AA believes that their national identity and the right to self-determination should be safeguarded. Their goal of self-determination remains unchanged, but how they use this scenario to further their development creates a different test. Their historical tendencies speak volumes about them. The AA decided to continue its fight against the military due to its access to resources, well-established network and leadership. Consequently, the AA can use the following suggestions to achieve self-determination and triumph against the junta government.

Firstly, both internal and external communication routes must be established to be strategically significant and functional. Therefore, the AA must develop an understanding with the Chinese government and EAOs. Even though, at first glance, the Chinese government is a staunch backer of the junta regime, the torchbearer of the quest for ethnic self-determination cannot deny its relevance in the case of resources. The attack on the navy vessel in Sittwe is clear evidence that the Chinese government has provided arms transfers to the AA. On the attack on India's Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project in March 2020, a representative for the AA, U Khaing Thukka, said, "China acknowledges us, but India doesn't," so exposing Beijing's intention.

Secondly, the AA was initially trained and controlled under the auspices of the KIA, making the KIA a valuable partner within Myanmar. As part of their commitment, the KIA has pledged to advance their revolution aggressively, attacking local military objectives of national significance. By conquering the center of jade extraction in Kachin state, the KIA has a fortunate chance to inflict significant economic and political harm on the Tatmadaw. For their part, the anti-junta People's Defense Force and the shadow government comprised of junta opponents have allied with the Karen National Union, Myanmar's oldest ethnic armed force. This alliance will allow revolutionary groups with similar goals to pool resources and communicate with one another.

Third, the AA needs to keep their minds open to the possibility that their strategies must change. The junta's strategy and methods are changing; thus, it is essential to be adaptable and robust before obstacles occur. The junta government extended the national emergency it enacted when it staged the coup in 2021, delaying the national elections it vowed when it seized office. The AA might stress non-violent and peaceful opposition measures in this strategic impasse to obtain more public support and maintain the moral high ground. Although the postponed election and the significance of respecting democratic norms might not be the AA's actual cause of revolution, they might stimulate social media, conventional media, and grassroots movements to educate the public about elections and democracy. The suspension of the elections may demand a shift of focus, but if the AA can accept the change, it opens a window that it can exploit.

If they choose to sustain the revolution, this is the right approach for them. As one of the

prominent EAOs in Myanmar, the AA exemplifies the numerous calculations that a revolutionary group conducts when considering changing circumstances. It is not always easy to decide whether or not to continue a revolution, but the situation of Arakanese EAOs clearly demonstrates several aspects that support their goal. A problem still lies ahead for the current military rule in Myanmar as to how far they can go in accommodating requests from all armed group stakeholders to eliminate long-term conflict between ethnic groups and states in developing a solid peace process framework. The AA condemned the recent coup in Myanmar in 2021. The Arakanese people's hope for a stable peace deal has faded. Thus, the AA has reinforced and rejuvenated the "Arakanese Dream" of the people. Therefore, the coup d'état in 2021 energized the Arakanese people's struggle for self-determination and catalyzed the struggle for sovereignty, making it through the "Arakanese Dream."

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