

Forum: Security Council (SC)

Issue: Resolving the coup in Myanmar

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Introduction:

Throughout its history as an independent nation, Myanmar has struggled with civil unrest and governmental stability. Since gaining independence from British colonial rule in 1948, Myanmar has been under the rule of multiple different military juntas and has fought for democracy. This long-awaited democracy was finally sought in 2011 when a military-implemented civilian parliament was imposed. However, in retaliation to a supposed fraudulent November 2020 general election which the National League for Democracy (NLD) government refused to rerun polls for, on 1 February, the Tatmadaw staged a coup in which they forcefully detained multiple Burmese members of the government and seized control of Myanmar.

Min Aung Hlaing, the general who seized power through the 2021 coup, condemned the actions of Myanmar's election commission for failing to resolve the voter fraud, and resultantly, the Tatmadaw declared a year-long state of emergency. The military forces proceeded to seal off roads around the capital of Myanmar and shut off the international airport, and started an internet blackout.

The shift in power triggered nation-wide prominent civil disobedience and mass protesting. Brutality and conflict between the military and civilians/protestors have resulted in hundreds of deaths and over 6000 arrests.

Definition of Key Terms:

1. **Burma:** the British name for Myanmar, a Southeast Asian nation of more than 100 ethnic groups, before it was renamed in 1989.
2. **Coup d'état:** Generally shortened to “coup”, a coup d'état is a seizure and removal of a government and its powers which is typically violent, illegal, and unconstitutional and done by a political faction, military, or a dictator.
3. **Tatmadaw:** Myanmar's military force who deposed the democratically elected members of the country's ruling party's coup d'état in Myanmar
4. **Junta:** a military or political group that rules a country after taking power by force.

Background Information

History of Burmese Political Rule

Throughout the nation's history, even after their independence, Myanmar has struggled with military rule, civil unrest, and conflict. Myanmar gained independence from British colonial rule in 1948 and has since been under the rule of a military junta for many of its independent years. The newly independent Myanmar (then known as the “Union of Burma”) began as a parliamentary democracy. This remained until General U Ne Win overthrew the democratically elected leader and then ruled for the next twenty-six years, starting in 1962.

Ne Win imposed a new decree that nationalized Burma's major enterprises which quickly caused Burma's economic situation to deteriorate and lead to the creation of a black-market economy. Corruption, rapid shifts in economic policy, poverty, and a scarcity of food led to large, mainly student-led protests in 1988. Burma's military forces imposed their forces on these protesters, killing over three thousand students and displacing thousands more. Following these acts of brutality, Ne Win resigned as

chairman of his party, and a new military coup, this one led by Saw Maung, took power. This newly formed government then renamed the country to Myanmar.

In 2007, the military government, wanting to attract investment, reduced their reliance on China and built relations with other countries. In 2008, the junta established a new decree that gave the military widespread jurisdiction even under civilian rule. However, to the surprise of many international observers, this military junta was officially disestablished in 2011.

2011 Transfer to Civilian Leadership

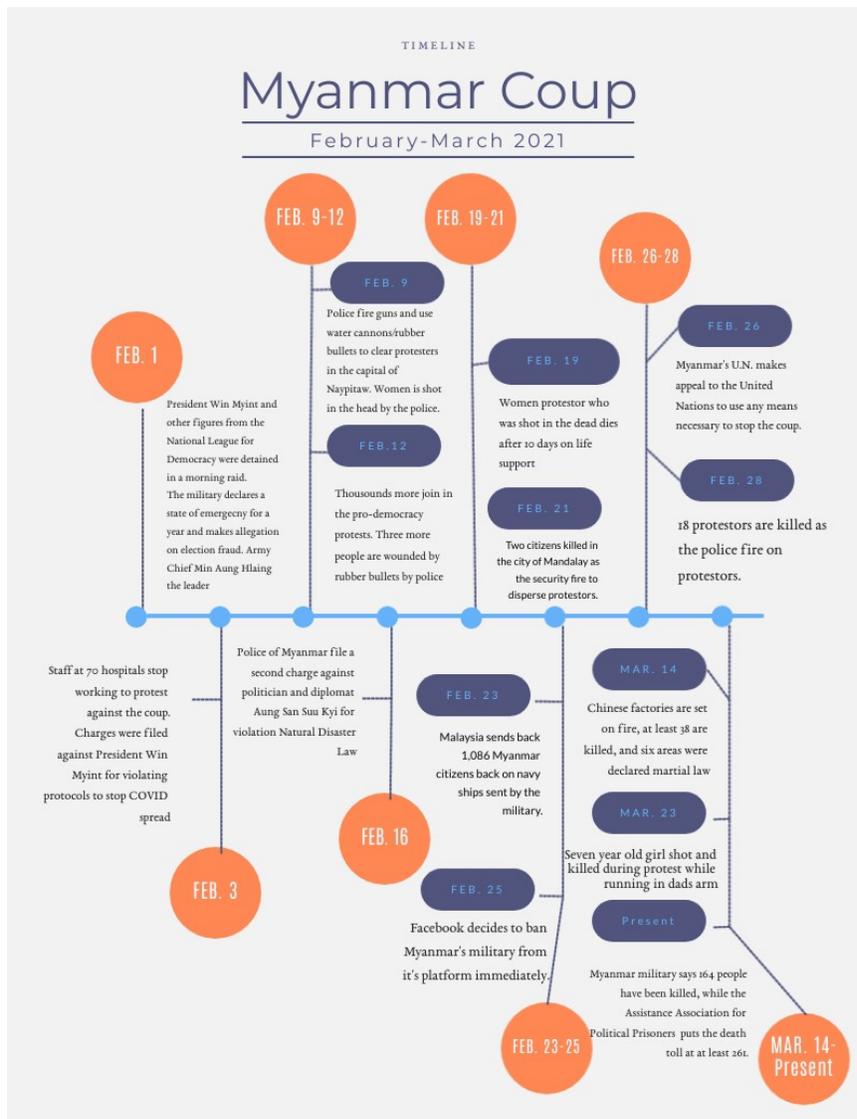
In 2011, the long-time military junta was officially disestablished and a military-implemented civilian parliament was introduced as a “transitional government”, in which the Prime Minister, Thein Sein, was appointed president. Many believed this newfound democracy to be the start of a new era for Myanmar. The country’s longtime opposition party, the **National League for Democracy**, led by **Aung San Suu Kyi**, was then allowed to run in 2012 for parliamentary by-elections and won 43 of the 45 seats offered.

The Military Coup

In late January 2021, the Tatmadaw demanded a rerun of polls from the November 2020 general elections, with a spokesperson providing the ominous warning that “We do not say the Tatmadaw will take power. We do not say it will not as well.” Then, in February 2021, the military forcefully detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and 24 other ministers from the NLD government). In this coup, they officially retook control of the government, halting all hopes for democratic progress in its tracks. At this point on 1 February, a year-long state of emergency was declared. At this point, then-Vice President U Myint Swe was appointed as the temporary President for the duration of the state of emergency, and Commander-in-Chief of the Defence Services, Min Aung Hlaing, was allowed legislative, executive, and judicial

power of the State for the duration of the state of emergency, to enable him to “carry out necessary measures to restore the union,” as stated in section 418 of the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar.

On 6 February, the Tatmadaw announced a full internet blackout and by 3 March, violence further escalated when 38 people were killed as the Military attempted to repress Anti-Coup protests and 400 student protestors were rounded up, leading to the largest mass arrest since the commencement of the Coup.



Coup Timeline from February to March 2021

Current Situation

Journalists and media staff in Myanmar

Since the coup, the Tatmadaw has arrested at least 56 journalists, including reporters for BBC and the Associated Press, of whom half so far have been released. The Tatmadaw has also outlawed several online news outlets and has cut off mobile data services repeatedly whenever deemed necessary. At least three photojournalists have been shot at, and wounded, by the military while taking photographs of the anti-coup demonstrations and soldiers regularly check citizen phones for protest videos or photos. If caught with video clips or photos of protestors, civilians could be imprisoned. A spokesman for the Tatmadaw has responded saying that “if [journalists] actions violate the law, then they will be arrested.”

Impact of COVID-19 in post-coup Myanmar

Only 2.8% of the 54 million people in Myanmar are fully vaccinated while oxygen and crucial medical equipment have become extremely expensive and scarce in supply. Many medical doctors and staff have been on strike as a part of the civil disobedience movement against the coup. While the Tatmadaw has been reporting approximately 1,000 cases and 15 deaths daily from COVID-19, experts estimate the actual numbers are significantly higher. They are led to believe this because a mere 15,000 COVID tests are being conducted daily, with an infection rate of 37% (above the expected 5%).

Protests against the coup and the Tatmadaw

Ever since the coup, at least 7,300 people have been detained and more than 1,000 protestors have been killed by the Tatmadaw. Millions of people have taken to the streets to protest while staging a national strike. Recently, the Tatmadaw announced it would free more than 5,600 anti-regime protestors in its first-ever significant release of political prisoners since the coup.

Economic impact on Myanmar

The World Bank has estimated that Myanmar's economy will contract by around 18% this year because of the effects of the coup and the pandemic. The share of people living in poverty in Myanmar is likely to more than double by early 2022 compared to 2019, and there have been heightened food security risks especially impacting the poor.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The Tatmadaw

The Tatmadaw is the official name of the Myanmar armed forces. After the 2020 general election, the Tatmadaw refused to accept the results and alleged widespread voter fraud. However, the Union Election Commission, the national election commission in Myanmar, has said there is no evidence to support these claims. The coup took place right as the new session of parliament was about to start, with the Tatmadaw detaining Aung San Suu Kyi and other high-ranking politicians. The Tatmadaw then declared a one-year state of emergency, and military commander-in-chief Min Aung Hlaing became the de facto leader of Myanmar at the time, and in August 2021 he became the official Prime Minister of Myanmar. The Tatmadaw has imposed curfews and limits to gatherings as well as having reportedly used water cannons, rubber bullets, and live ammunition to try to disperse protestors.

People's Republic of China

China has opposed international intervention, blocked sanctions on Myanmar, and blocked a UN Security Council statement condemning the coup. However, China has also called for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, democratic reforms in Myanmar, and backed a UN Security Council statement condemning the violent response of the Tatmadaw against peaceful protestors. It is important to note that China is one of the largest investors in Myanmar even after the coup and Myanmar is a key supplier to China for rare earth metals such as copper, dysprosium, and terbium.

United States of America

The United States has condemned the coup, placed sanctions on top military officials, and imposed restrictions on exports to Myanmar. President Joe Biden has said that the violence against the protestors from the Tatmadaw was “absolutely outrageous” The USA alongside the UK, were among 12 countries that issued a joint statement condemning “the use of lethal force against unarmed people by the Myanmar Armed Forces and associated security services”.

European Union (EU)

The European Union, an economic and political union comprising 27 countries in the European continent, has placed sanctions on top military officials and companies in Myanmar following the coup. The EU also placed an arms embargo as well as a ban on the sale of equipment used for monitoring communications to Myanmar.

Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN)

The Association of Southeast Asia Nations is an economic union of 10 countries (Myanmar included) in the Southeast Asia region, and the goal of the ASEAN is to promote intergovernmental cooperation between member states. The group is known for its non-interference in each other’s domestic affairs, and on the day of the coup ASEAN issued a statement calling for a “return to normalcy in accordance with the will and interests of the people of Myanmar.” The member states of ASEAN have had differing responses to the coup, with states such as Singapore and Malaysia expressing concern while states such as Thailand and Cambodia said the coup was an internal affair. Recently, ASEAN held a summit where Prime Minister Min Aung Hlaing was barred from attending because of a lack of progress in ending the country’s crisis.

Thailand

The Thailand military has been accused of supplying aid to the military government of Myanmar and Myanmar’s post-coup Foreign Ministers’ first overseas visit was to Thailand. When news about the coup first broke, the Thailand government made a statement calling the coup an internal affair. It is also important to note that foreign

investment from Thai businesses in Myanmar ranks behind only China and Singapore and that Thailand accounts for nearly a quarter of Myanmar's exports.

National United Government

The National United Government of Myanmar is made out of exiled lawmakers and resigned civil servants which acts as a shadow government of Myanmar. It is very popular with the public and is recognized by the EU. The parallel government has been helping distribute humanitarian aid to the 200,000 Burmese people who have been displaced since the coup.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

This statement was released 9 months after the coup and was agreed to by all 15 members of the Security Council. The statement called for the immediate end to the fighting to ensure the safety of civilians.

- Security Council Press Statement on Myanmar, 10th November 2021 (**SC/14697**)
 - Since it was just a press statement, no actual action was taken and the statement was more symbolic, however, this statement does make it clear that the Security Council unanimously agrees there needs to be an end to the violence in Myanmar.

This resolution from the United Nations General Assembly called for a stop to the flow of arms to Myanmar and urged the military to release detainees and respect the election results. The resolution was adopted with the support of 119 countries, with only 1 country opposing it, 36 countries abstaining, and 37 General Assembly members not voting.

- The situation in Myanmar, 18th June 2021 (**A/RES/75/287**)

This statement was released just three days after the coup and all 15 members of the Security Council approved the statement, which called for the immediate release

of all detained following the state of emergency and expressed concern at the restrictions on journalists and media workers.

- Security Council Press Statement on Situation in Myanmar, 4th February 2021 (SC/14430)
 - Though just a press statement, and as we later saw in the coming months not a guarantee of action, this statement from all 15 nations of the Security Council still highlights a crucial aspect of the situation in Myanmar which is the detainment of politicians such as Aung San Suu Kyi and the restrictions placed on journalists and media workers.

This statement was released just a month after the coup and was made by the President of the Security Council on behalf of the Council. The statement condemned the violence against peaceful protestors as well as expressing its support for democratic transition in Myanmar.

- Statement by the President of the Security Council, 10th March 2021 (S/PRST/2021/5)

Possible Solutions

One solution is for the United Nations Security Council to deploy peacekeeping troops and forces in order to de-escalate the tensions and situation between the military and the protestors. Member nations could also agree to directly send in their own troops to work with peacekeeping forces, or simply increase the number of peacekeeping forces supplied to the UN for this operation.

An issue that has arisen following the coup is the lack of communication between leaders and countries that condemned the coup and the Tatmadaw. A way to solve this would be diplomatic discussions between member nations and the Tatmadaw, hosted by bodies such as ASEAN, so Myanmar can directly co-ordinate and negotiate with nations to help resolve the effects of the coup.

The United Nations Security Council can also give international and humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, with some strings attached. After all, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that around 3 million people in Myanmar are in need of humanitarian assistance. However, the council could stipulate that Myanmar must take specific actions, such as releasing all journalists detained, in order to ensure that such aid, which the citizens of Myanmar clearly need, is given.

Another international concern seems to be the potential increase in refugees from Myanmar especially as over the last few months some 250 rebel group have emerged and are clashing with the Tatmadaw, assassinating low-level junta officials, and bombing strategic routes, army bases, and infrastructure. As a result, the conflict between guerrilla fighters and the Tatmadaw is having a significant impact on civilians' livelihood and member nations should also consider solutions to help support any refugees as well as deal with the conflict between rebel groups and the Tatmadaw.

Lastly, the Security Council could place sanctions on Myanmar should they not comply with a specific timeline for its transition to democracy in order to incentivize or punish Myanmar. Under Article 41 of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council can authorize sanctions as long as they do not involve the use of armed force. Several nations have already sanctioned key Myanmar government officials. However, in the case sanctions are placed, delegates should ensure that there is not a significant impact on the general population as a whole so that the situation does not become direr than it currently is.

These are just a few possible solutions, and delegates are strongly encouraged to take into consideration the sovereignty of Myanmar as a nation when writing clauses.

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