

ASEAN'S CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT POLICY  
TOWARD MYANMAR (BURMA)

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## ABSTRACT

ASEAN'S CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT POLICY TOWARD MYANMAR (BURMA), by Major Paul S. F. Cheak, 144 pages.

This research studied the effectiveness of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) policy of "constructive engagement" toward Myanmar (Burma), with the aim of recommending appropriate improvements to this policy. Myanmar is one of the world's longest military-ruled dictatorships and is beset with many internal problems. Its government has been criticized by some countries and non-governmental organizations for human rights abuses and political suppression. There are also allegations of cross border criminal activities, such as human and drug trafficking, coordinated by criminal gangs in that country. Despite its reputation, Myanmar was accepted as an ASEAN member in 1997. Since then, the association is one of the few organizations in the world with diplomatic links to that country. ASEAN's approach of diplomatic engagement, commonly referred to as "constructive engagement," is geopolitically advantageous to ASEAN in many aspects. However, it runs contrary to the current policies of diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions imposed by some Western powers such as the US and the EU. This research has studied the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" from three angles – an "International" perspective, a "Regional" perspective, and a "Grassroots" perspective. It has found that ASEAN should not only continue "constructive engagement," but that the association should offer even greater assistance to Myanmar. These actions will help improve the quality of life of Myanmar's citizens and strengthen the country, as well as generating regional benefits.

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## ACRONYMS AND GLOSSARY

AIPMC	ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EU	European Union
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma, an elected government-in-exile
NLD	National League of Democracy
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SPRTD	Seven Point Roadmap Toward Democracy
UN	United Nations

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Democracy is not perfect and I think you have to keep working at it. So unless my lifetime is unexpectedly short, I certainly will see democracy come to Burma.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Laureate<sup>1</sup>

#### Background

Most of the world would hardly have remembered the troubles in Myanmar if not for the violent crackdown against protestors on 27 September 2007. What began as a demonstration against the sudden rise in fuel prices quickly transformed into a pro-democracy and anti-government protest. After tolerating days of street rallies, the Myanmar's military-led government finally attacked the protestors, most of them Buddhist monks and unarmed civilians, to restore order. Since these attacks occurred during the time of the United Nations General Assembly, the media spotlight was once again thrown on this nation ruled by one of the world's longest military dictatorships.<sup>2</sup> The deaths of at least 13 protestors, including a Japanese journalist, as well as the beatings and arrests of hundreds of monks and civilians during this crackdown resulted in diplomatic outrage mainly from the West as well as from other Southeast Asian countries. According to Myanmar's military, almost 3,000 people were arrested after the event.<sup>3</sup> Even so, the casualties in 2007 pale in comparison to similar events almost twenty years earlier. During the 1988 "Four Eights Demonstrations" held on 8 August, 1988, government forces opened fire at the unarmed crowds, reportedly killing thousands in a bid to quell pro-democracy demonstrations of a similar scale.<sup>4</sup>

This violent episode, one of many in Myanmar's modern history, raises questions concerning the effectiveness of outside pressures to change the policies of the ruling junta. Since the military government assumed power, a few members of the international community have adopted various foreign policies and strategies toward Myanmar, with the aim of influencing political change in that country. Some have applied disincentives such as sanctions, while others such as the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) continue to have regular interactions with that country. Due to Myanmar's slow pace of reform, the effectiveness of both approaches have been criticized. Furthermore, the attacks on 27 September have caused many analysts to challenge the effectiveness of ASEAN's approach of "constructive engagement" once again.<sup>5</sup>

The purpose of the study is to determine how "constructive engagement" in its current form needs to become more effective in facilitating improvement within Myanmar. This study will begin with an introduction to that country and the major issues that exist, such as its political repression and social inequality. It will present various debates regarding the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" in encouraging what major world powers regard as much needed political and social reform in that country. It will also examine the challenges that ASEAN faces in influencing Myanmar. The study will then use three perspectives to analyze indicators of Myanmar's progress toward democracy. The "International," "Regional," and "Grassroots" perspectives will determine whether the current policy of "constructive engagement" meets the expectations of the international community toward Myanmar, balance regional dynamics, and alleviate the hardships of the Burmese respectively. Finally, using the

findings from the three perspectives, the study will provide some recommendations on how ASEAN may better facilitate Myanmar's progress in tackling its internal challenges

Myanmar has many internal problems which stem primarily from the policies of its military government. Since assuming power, the military government has taken over almost all civilian functions in the country. It has rejected advice from subject matter experts resulting in failed economic and social improvement policies. United Nations (UN) and Human Rights Watch reports of the country's human rights situation highlight many cases of forced deportation and ethnic cleansing of minorities, extended detention of various high profile opposition leaders such as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and the employment of child soldiers, many of which allege government involvement.<sup>6,7</sup> In addition, Myanmar is categorized by the UN as one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, a significant fact illustrating the weakness of its government's economic and industrial ability.<sup>8</sup> Some have further argued that the consequences of weak economic policies have been exacerbated by the economic sanctions imposed by the United States (US) and the European Union (EU).

Its ruling junta's standard of governance has resulted in a host of other issues. These include the spread of HIV/AIDS within that country, and the relatively unrestricted criminal activities such as the production and trafficking of narcotics, as well as human trafficking. The government's inability to resolve political disagreements with some of its minority groups is one reason why that country's internal situation is tense. This has resulted in frequent clashes between these factions and refugees fleeing into neighboring Thailand. Although the ruling junta has been successful in using force to impose social order, it is incapable of managing more complex problems, such as national

reconciliation, economic development and democratic representation, effectively and amicably.

The internal situation in Myanmar creates immediate concerns for ASEAN. These concerns include cross border issues such as the flow of refugees, as well as the narcotics and human trafficking. Another immediate concern to ASEAN is the geopolitical interplay between India, China and Myanmar. Due to Myanmar's location, these rising Asian giants are vying for that country's favor to meet their respective national interests. This has a significant impact on the effectiveness of ASEAN's policies toward Myanmar, which will be discussed in later chapters. Furthermore, some member states in ASEAN have projected that Myanmar's government will require assistance in managing the increasing myriad of pandemic diseases and transnational threats that may affect the region in the near future.<sup>9</sup>

There are also many second-order effects to the region caused by Myanmar's internal situation. For instance, Myanmar's internal problems have created diplomatic dilemmas for ASEAN. To cite a recent example, after the junta's attacks on protestors in September 2007, Myanmar drew strong criticism for its use of violence from the international community, including ASEAN and its member states. ASEAN's criticism of Myanmar has been one of the strongest toward any member states since its inception as an intergovernmental organization. Nevertheless, ASEAN is limited in applying greater pressure on Myanmar to change its policies. On the contrary, it seeks to ensure Myanmar remains engaged with the organization to balance China and India's influence over Myanmar,<sup>10</sup> and in turn preserve regional stability.

Another second-order effect is the pressure that ASEAN receives from the West to take punitive actions against Myanmar. Despite their comments of dismay after the September 2007 riots, leaders of ASEAN member states continue to reiterate their support for Myanmar's continued membership in the association. Due to that country's close affiliation with ASEAN, the association has been strongly criticized, and held to account for Myanmar's behavior. It has faced external pressure by the US and EU to improve the democratic performance of its "family member," a view ASEAN takes of Myanmar.<sup>11</sup> Calls for the US and EU to boycott ASEAN meetings if Myanmar assumes chairmanship of the association in 2006 was one of the pressures the association faced because of that member state. Since it is possible for the internal issues in Myanmar to cause a rippling effect throughout Southeast Asia, it is in the interest for ASEAN to step up efforts to facilitate improvements in that country.

The central problem in this study is ASEAN's policy of "constructive engagement." Despite constant diplomatic dialogue through "constructive engagement," Myanmar's internal policies and measures of successful governance have not improved significantly. While ASEAN supports Myanmar's efforts to change, it is clearly not pleased with many aspects in that country. Even so, the association has limited ability to influence change in Myanmar. Due to the constraints set by its charter and the cultural norms of the region, the association does not have the means to impose tougher policies, such as economic sanctions. As mentioned earlier, ASEAN also has to balance the incentives offered by China and India, which could negate the effects of diplomatic disincentives applied by other foreign powers. Furthermore, the insular and stubborn attitudes of Myanmar's ruling regime makes diplomacy extremely challenging for



ASEAN, which may be a major challenge for the association to assist that country. Some critics have argued for ASEAN to take other measures such as suspending or even expelling Myanmar from the association. Even if ASEAN adopts such measures, it would not only give up “constructive engagement” but also violate the association’s major principle of non-interference in the affairs of member states.

Although the “constructive engagement” has failed to change Myanmar’s oppressive policies, the principle of non-interference has hitherto proven its worth in maintaining regional stability. In addition, Southeast Asia’s modern history shows that ASEAN member states, such as Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand, have made tremendous progress in democracy, even though there have been periods of internal unrest or military rule, in their nation’s history. Although ASEAN faces much pressures to influence reform in Myanmar, it is also in the association’s interest to do so for security and economic reasons. Therefore, ASEAN’s dilemma is to maintain regional harmony through a policy of non-interference, yet increase its effectiveness in encouraging change in Myanmar. This dilemma will be explored in the primary and secondary research questions described in the next chapter.

### Research Questions

This study will focus on the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” toward Myanmar. The primary research question is “what should ASEAN do to improve its policy of “constructive engagement” with Myanmar?” There are two secondary research questions in this thesis that aims to determine potential areas for engagement and the “constructive engagement” today.

The first secondary research question is “what are the issues in Myanmar that ASEAN should intervene with respect to support?” To answer this question, Myanmar’s internal issues and their fundamental causes will be explored and redefined. It is necessary to redefine the problems in Myanmar because until now, most calls for domestic reform have not adequately and fairly recognized the complex political and social fabric of the country. Currently, Myanmar’s government is perceived negatively by other nations, especially by those from the West, due to its atrocious human rights record, political instability, autocratic policies, and its detention of high profile political figures. As the international community pressures Myanmar to improve these problems, it typically fails to consider that the country is also trying to cope with a myriad of internal challenges such as illegal narcotics production, secession movements, and a struggling economy. Furthermore, it tends to overlook how Myanmar’s past colonial experience and cultural traits drive the junta’s policies and attitudes today. Optimistically, it may be possible for ASEAN to help Myanmar carry some of its burdens of governance, in order to increase that country’s bandwidth for addressing other pressing issues. This assistance could also build goodwill over time, and possibly aid in influencing policy changes in that country.

The second secondary research question is “whether ASEAN’s policy of “constructive engagement” with Myanmar is achieving its intended goals?” This study will determine whether ASEAN’s current “constructive engagement” approach in dealing with Myanmar is effective. Three perspectives will be used to assess whether “constructive engagement” helps to address the social problems of the Burmese, maintain the regional security dynamics, and meet international demands for reform. Conclusions

from these perspectives will support the recommendations to improve “constructive engagement.”

### Assumptions

This study assumes that ASEAN has the desire to expand its original focus in economic development to include greater humanitarian improvements in Southeast Asia, as espoused in the ASEAN Vision 2020. In this document, the association highlights the need to protect human rights in Southeast Asia as well as continued prosperity and stability for the region. It also assumes that individual members within ASEAN are in collective agreement to assist Myanmar. Furthermore, it assumes that Myanmar’s ruling regime would consider allowing foreign assistance if there were sufficient incentives for them and for their country to do so. There were also a number of assumptions made, particularly in Chapter four, which include the vested interests major parties may have with each other that are generally concealed, and rarely articulated.

### Burma or Myanmar

In the thesis, the name Burma will be used to describe the country before 1989. Myanmar will be used after 1989. To assist the reader, the following explanations provide some context.

The Kingdom of Myanma, literally meaning fast or strong,<sup>12</sup> was renamed Burma by the British after King Thibaw was defeated in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> In 1989, after assuming power and annulling the results of the national elections, Myanmar’s ruling junta renamed the country Myanmar, possibly to reject what it may have considered a less than glorious colonial history, and revive its cultural and historical heritage.<sup>14</sup> While

the UN and most countries around the world have accepted the name “Myanmar,” other organizations and countries such as the EU and the US have continued to refer to Myanmar as Burma, in protest and rejection of the junta’s legitimacy.

In this thesis, “Burmans” refer to the ethnic majority in Myanmar while the “Burmese” will refer to the citizens of Myanmar, including the country’s ethnic minorities.

### “Constructive Engagement” and the “ASEAN Way”

The “ASEAN Way” is the style of diplomacy employed by ASEAN member states toward each other. It is characterized by dialogue, consultation, consensus-building, and strict adherence to the policy of non-interference and non-commentary in the affairs of fellow members. So far, the uniqueness of the “ASEAN Way” has contributed significantly to preventing military conflicts within the region.

“Constructive engagement,” which is the central focus of this thesis, is a subset of the “ASEAN Way.” Initiated by the Thai government in 1991, it is ASEAN’s diplomatic approach that relates specifically toward Myanmar.<sup>15</sup> “Constructive engagement” favors dialogue with Myanmar, and is diametrically opposite to the policies of compulsion including sanctions and diplomatic isolation employed by the west. In addition to dialogue, ASEAN’s engagement with Myanmar has also evolved to include pointed criticism over the policies and actions of its military government, a slight departure from the “ASEAN Way” of non-criticism. In this study, constructive engagement does not preclude constructive criticism, and is valid as long as policies involving diplomatic isolation, use of force, economic sanctions, or any other subversive or coercive techniques are not employed toward Myanmar.

### Limitations

In the course of the research, it was clear that the majority of the material available on this subject tend to have a bias against Myanmar's military regime, primarily due to its tarnished human rights record. This is understandable as brutality and injustice toward innocent civilians tend to ignite strong emotions. However, objectivity is essential to develop new approaches to influence change in that country. Wherever necessary, assumptions will be made to offer some balanced perspectives on the issue at hand.

### Scope

The key focus of this study is neither ASEAN itself nor reform within Myanmar, but rather ASEAN's "constructive engagement" approach toward Myanmar. The aim of this study is to suggest areas where this approach toward Myanmar may be improved. The three perspectives used in this study will form the framework for measuring the effectiveness of "constructive engagement." Although there are many possible solutions that ASEAN may adopt toward Myanmar, this thesis will only recommend those that neither violate the principles of the ASEAN Charter nor upset the sensitive geopolitical dynamics in the region. This study will also compare "constructive engagement" with alternative approaches, such as economic sanctions. This comparison is not intended to show how one approach is better than another, but rather to have better clarity on whether improvements or deterioration in Myanmar may be attributed to either approach. To provide context for the study, a brief introduction on Myanmar, ASEAN, and other international players that are involved, as well as the ongoing debates about the effectiveness of these strategies, will be presented.

There are also a number of issues which will not be covered in detail by this study. This study will not analyze the rationale behind the national strategic interests of other nations, such as China, India, and the US, toward Myanmar. Although the actions of these countries can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of “constructive engagement,” this study will not analyze how they could impact ASEAN’s actions. In addition, this study will not estimate the costs required to implement its recommendations.

The turbulent events in Myanmar after September 2007 have led to rapidly changing developments in both its domestic scene as well as its relations with the rest of the world. In order to limit the extent and scope of this thesis, the literature cut-off date was set for the end of January 2008.

### Significance

The issues in Myanmar are important in many ways. To the Burmese, the current policies and governing methods of its military-run government have created very trying living conditions. The dismal state of the economy has severely affected their way of life, livelihood, means of survival, freedom, and dignity. The society on average suffers from poor health and low levels of education. Minority tribes, in particular, face alleged ethnic persecution, criminal injustice and oppression by their government. Regionally, Myanmar’s social and political problems have led to border clashes with its neighbors, and are the source of transnational criminal activities such as narcotics and human trafficking. If the current situation is left unchecked, it is possible that more serious problems may spread from Myanmar, such as an influenza pandemic or an HIV/AIDS crisis, which are currently very serious issues in the country.

As Myanmar remains reluctant to change, ASEAN's reputation suffers. Since its inception in 1967, the association has been a crucial element in contributing to regional stability in Southeast Asia. However, due to Myanmar's membership in the association, not only has ASEAN's credibility come under scrutiny, its relevance has been brought into question too, potentially casting doubts as to the future of Southeast Asian unity and prosperity.

This study hopes to provide a fresh perspective on the issues in Myanmar to facilitate strategies that not only deal with the symptomatic problems of Myanmar, but also its root causes. A stable, responsible and prosperous Myanmar that respects human dignity and freedom, and international law will benefit not only its own citizens, but the global community as well.

### Summary and Conclusion

In summary, there are many complex political and social issues in Myanmar. The government's inability to address these issues and the ensuing violence as a result of continued conflict has led to international criticism and diplomatic isolation by many nations in the West. The regional powers of India and China have competed to provide significant benefits and support without demands for change. In contrast to these methods, ASEAN has adopted a "constructive engagement" approach of engaging Myanmar but with the aim of influencing change in that country over the long term. This study will analyze whether this approach has worked or is showing signs of partial success by comparing it to its antithesis of a strategy of sanctions and isolation. It will then offer some suggestions to modify ASEAN's current approach, if necessary, to achieve better success.

The next chapter will provide the necessary context for this study by introducing the various issues that are present in Myanmar and the various opinions regarding ASEAN's approach of "constructive engagement."

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Hoda Kobe of NBC's Dateline.

<sup>2</sup> Beech, Hannah. 2007. *Burma's Faceless Leaders*. October 1. Time website: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1666978,00.html> [accessed January 7, 2008].

<sup>3</sup> The Associated Press. 2007. *Myanmar junta: 3,000 detained in protest*. October 17. Yahoo News website: [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20071017/ap\\_on\\_re\\_as/myanmar;\\_ylt=AtNJXi0WeuQfqkjF0hGqv3sBxg8F](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20071017/ap_on_re_as/myanmar;_ylt=AtNJXi0WeuQfqkjF0hGqv3sBxg8F) [accessed October 17, 2007].

<sup>4</sup> BBC News. 2007. *Burma's 1988 protests*. September 25. BBC News website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7012158.stm> [accessed October 3, 2007].

<sup>5</sup> Association of South East Asian Nations. 2004. *ASEAN to Pursue Constructive Engagement with Myanmar After Power Struggle*. October 25. ASEAN website: <http://www.aseansec.org/afp/78.htm> [accessed October, 13, 2007].

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations. 2003. *Interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Myanmar*. August 5. United Nations website: [http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/eccddb907776a319c1256da900308f2c/\\$FILE/N0345983.pdf](http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/eccddb907776a319c1256da900308f2c/$FILE/N0345983.pdf) [accessed October 26, 2007].

<sup>7</sup> Human Rights Watch. 2007. *Sold to be Soldiers – The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma*. Human Rights Watch, Vol. 19, No. 15(C). October 2007. Human Rights Watch website: <http://hrw.org/reports/2007/burma1007/burma1007webwcover.pdf> [accessed January 4, 2008].

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States. 2007. *List of Least Developed Countries*. October 17. United Nations website: <http://www.un.org/special-rep/ohrls/lcd/list.htm> [accessed October 17, 2007].

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<sup>10</sup> Channel News Asia. 2007. ASEAN must avoid pushing Myanmar into civil war: George Yeo. October 7.  
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<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Bunge, Frederica, ed. 1983. *Burma, a Country Study (Area Handbook Series)*. Washington D.C.: Department of the Army. Pg. xx.

<sup>13</sup> BBC News. 2007. *Should it be Burma or Myanmar?* September 26. BBC News website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7013943.stm> [accessed October 3, 2007].

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sukhumbhand Paribatra. 1998. Engaging Myanmar in ASEAN. November 29. Thailand's Washington Embassy website:  
[http://www.thaiembdc.org/pressctr/statemnt/others/dfm\\_1198.htm](http://www.thaiembdc.org/pressctr/statemnt/others/dfm_1198.htm) [accessed January 5, 2008].

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

He admitted that he didn't know anything about economics. But he said every economist he talked to told him something different, and he didn't know what to do.

Henry Byroade, Former US Ambassador recalling a conversation with General Ne Win<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Myanmar has many internal problems which are complex and inter-related. To better understand these issues and develop possible solutions that may facilitate the return of Myanmar to a functional democracy, it is necessary to distinguish between viewing the entire country as one monolithic problem and separating the various elements that contribute to its instability. Although the majority of Myanmar's domestic issues may be traced back to the policies and actions of its military government, the country also faces many internal challenges created by other parties, such as separatist groups and criminal organizations.

Some commentaries fail to highlight or address these complexities, resulting in broad generalizations and an inability to identify the root causes of these problems. This broad generalization has led to arguments that the blanket application of travel bans, tourism boycotts, and economic sanctions on Myanmar have only hurt the local population that depend on these activities for their livelihood, instead of the leadership that governs the country. On the other hand, identifying the separate issues and analyzing them in terms of how they affect the country without holistically addressing the overall situation in Myanmar may not lead to long term stability. For instance, releasing political

prisoners, which Myanmar has done on numerous occasions, only to re-arrest them, has proven futile in changing its political climate. This chapter will briefly describe Myanmar and introduce its major issues. It will also present ASEAN's diplomatic approach toward Myanmar and highlight other actions that have been taken to influence change in that country.

This study will examine the effectiveness of ASEAN's "constructive engagement" strategy toward Myanmar. It is significant because the ASEAN approach is often viewed as contrary to the economic sanctions and policies of diplomatic isolation employed by Western powers. Devising an effective diplomatic strategy toward Myanmar could potentially benefit millions of Burmese and set conditions for better stability in Southeast Asia. The findings of this study will suggest refinements required to improve "constructive engagement."

This chapter is divided into three main sections. First, it describes Myanmar, its domestic issues, its internal stakeholders, and the concerns of the international community. Next, it describes opinions concerning "constructive engagement." Finally, it will examine diplomatic approaches adopted by other countries toward Myanmar. The next section is a brief introduction of Myanmar.

### Myanmar

To develop effective strategies to engage Myanmar, it is necessary to understand the complexities of nation-building in Myanmar and the root causes of its current challenges. Therefore, this section will provide a brief overview of the country, the major domestic issues it faces, an introduction to the stakeholders who have a major

influence over Myanmar's destiny, and finally the concerns of the international community.

### General Overview

The geopolitical and economic value that Myanmar brings to ASEAN is one of the main reasons why the association continues to engage that country. Myanmar is approximately 678,500 sq km and surrounded by hills and mountain ranges in the north, west and east. Relatively flatter terrain stretches from its northern foothills to the Irrawaddy Delta in the South. Its location is becoming increasingly important to its neighbors. Myanmar is situated in the midst of two Asian giants, India to its west and China to its northeast. Located at the northern most tip of Southeast Asia, it is ASEAN's western frontier member state with these economic and military powerhouses. There is potential for an overland trade-route between India, China and the ASEAN countries through Myanmar. Furthermore, it could also function very well as a military buffer zone between China and India too. Therefore, China, India, and ASEAN all have vested economic and security interests in that country. As a result, the unconditional diplomatic incentives offered by China and India to cultivate Myanmar's friendship have affected "constructive engagement's" effectiveness.

Myanmar's location adjacent to these growing markets, coupled by the wealth of natural resources it possesses, makes the application of coercive policies such as sanctions very difficult. Myanmar has natural resources such as natural gas, teak, various metals, and precious stones, such as rubies and sapphires. In addition, Myanmar has gold and silver deposits.<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, even Myanmar's rice has become a significant import item for many Asian countries due to the sudden increase in food

prices around the world. Despite various economic sanctions and trade embargos on Burmese products by the US, it continues to sustain itself through oil and petroleum, manufactured products, and the export of wood and precious gems to other countries, such as natural gas to Thailand. Due to the association's interests in Myanmar and that country's economy in preserving regime survival, ASEAN will may to continue its policy of diplomatic engagement since the chances of influencing change in that country through harsher policies, such as sanctions and membership suspension, have not appeared successful.

Although it is one of the poorest countries in the world, it has the potential to revive its economy through trade in its natural resources, as well as by education. This country of approximately 54 million people is predominantly Buddhist of the Theravada denomination, and two-thirds of the population are of ethnic Burman descent.<sup>3</sup> The remaining population consists of various ethnic minorities, many living in the hills surrounding the plains of the Irrawaddy. Amongst the various developing countries in the world, Myanmar has a relatively high literacy rate of almost 90 percent, mainly in the Burmese language. Clearly, there is much work that is needed to bring the country into the information age and connected into the global economy. This could be a major area of engagement for ASEAN to assist Myanmar, not only bring immediate benefits to the Burmese, but also as a lever to suggest improvements.



Figure 1. Map of Myanmar.<sup>4</sup>

Source: The Central Intelligence Agency. 2007. CIA World Factbook – Burma. CIA website: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> [accessed October 13, 2007].

### Clues from Myanmar's Modern History

Authors Myint-U and Owen recount of Myanmar's history may provide a glimpse into the motivations and psyche of its government and military that run the country.<sup>5,6</sup>

Prior to British colonization, Myanmar was a powerful and thriving kingdom that, at its peak, included territories in Thailand and strong alliances with its larger neighbors, India and China. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, it gradually succumbed to separatist movements, attacks by neighboring Chinese forces, and eventually the economic ambitions and military might of the British East India Company.<sup>7</sup> In 1885, after

numerous battles lost to the British, the country capitulated, resulting in King Thibaw's permanent exile to India with his family. Under British rule, it was renamed Burma. According to Myint-U, Myanmar's rich resources and its potential as an overland trade extension from India to China was one of the motivations for British conquest.<sup>8</sup> After successfully annexing the country, the British were beset with insurgencies and other security challenges.<sup>9</sup> Not only were the British counterinsurgency policies harsh, their policies of colonial governance did little to unify the Burmans and the hilltribes. In addition, the nonchalant attitude of some British officials toward Burmese customs such as the refusal to remove their footwear in the royal palaces, and the overall colonial experience could have contributed to junta's current mistrust of Western nations.<sup>10</sup>

Leading up to World War II, Burma obtained limited autonomy from the British, but these democratic reforms were unable to satisfy the nationalistic aspirations of many young, educated Burmese. Some of these nationalists adopted Communist ideals and worked with Japanese agents to overthrow the British during the war. Anti-British sentiments were reversed during the Japanese occupation during WW II, and Burmese nationalists, led by General Aung San, operated an underground anti-Japanese resistance movement. In 1948, Burma received its independence from the British, only to be faced with a civil war, continued insurgencies due to the unresolved status of Burma's ethnic minorities, and military coups.<sup>11</sup> This nationalistic attitude, combined with the strict communist methods of governance, would form the ideological bedrock of Myanmar's military government until today.

In the years between its independence and military rule, Burma enjoyed democratic freedom and an economy that was improving steadily. However, the situation

in independent Burma was not entirely rosy. Myint-U explains that the independent Burma had not addressed the sensitive issue of autonomy and equal representation for some minority groups such as the Karen.<sup>12</sup> This oversight, fueled by foreign intervention in domestic politics, edged Burma toward a civil war between the central government in Rangoon and the minority tribes in the hills. The ascent toward prosperity in the 1950s ended when the military, under General Ne Win, seized power in 1962. One of the key leaders in Burma's independence movement, Ne Win replaced civilian government officials with loyal military colleagues who had little experience or knowledge in effective public administration. Owen and Myint-U noted that democratic freedom and its economic potential spiraled downward under Ne Win's failed socialist economic policies.<sup>13,14</sup> From that time, the unresolved domestic issues such as the political status of the Burmese minority groups, the negative effects of colonialism, and the ultra-nationalist attitudes of the military converged into the complex web of issues that exist in the country till today. As such, one of the major consequences is the military junta's inability to cause economic growth, its xenophobia, and the continued ethnic rivalry in that country.

When Ne Win suddenly resigned in 1988, the Burmese took to the streets during the power vacuum to demand a return to democracy. Pro-democracy expressions were short-lived as the Army seized power to reverse the increasing anarchy in the streets, killing thousands of civilians in the process. Burma was then renamed Myanmar in 1989 by the military regime. Although national elections were held a year later, the results were not recognized by the regime and parliament has not been convened since. As a result, Myanmar's Prime Minister Elect, Dr. Sein Win, remains in exile in the United



States. Since the military assumed power in that country, they have entrenched themselves in the domestic politics and government. As a result, it is likely that ASEAN will have to work primarily with the military government despite the existence of other domestic stakeholders in that country. This will require even greater diplomatic ability for the association to overcome the possible autocratic attitudes of the government.

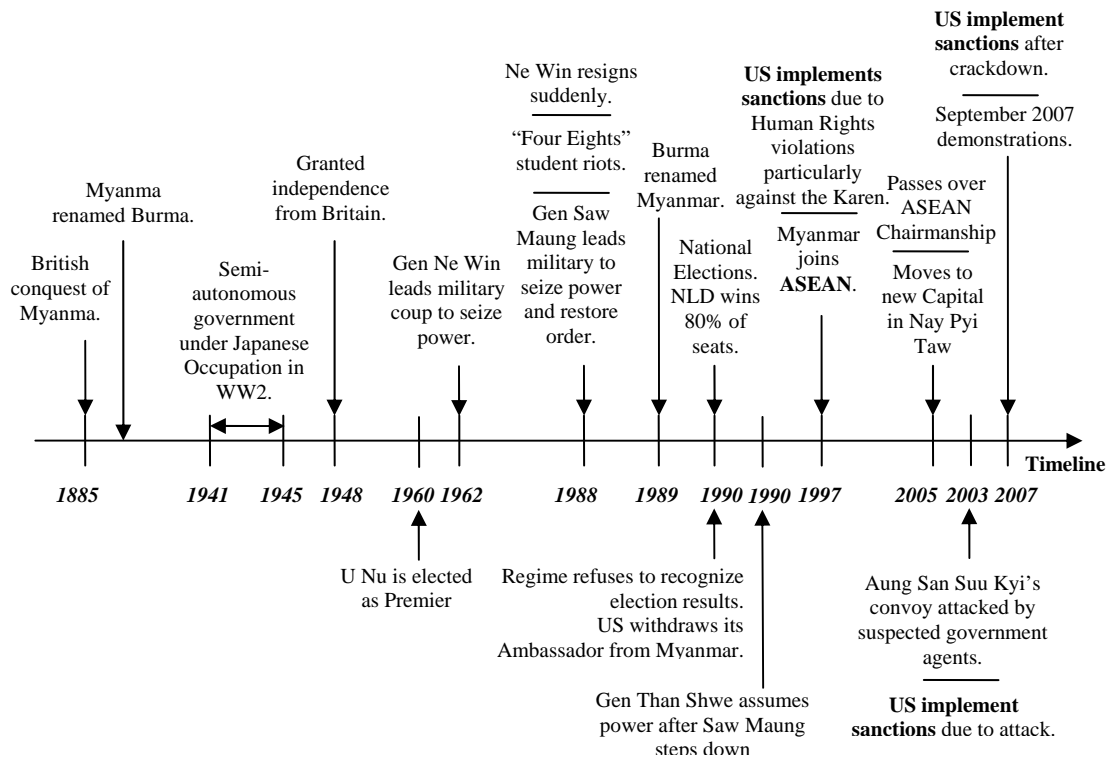


Figure 2. Timeline of Key Events in Myanmar's History (not to scale).

Note: The information used to construct this figure was derived from various sources used in this research

## Major Domestic Issues

There are many internal challenges within Myanmar including political suppression, ethnic rivalry, and widespread poverty. The political climate in that country remains tense and dominated by the military although, there have been some conciliatory moves in recent years between the military and other political parties. Attempts to draft a constitution for Myanmar in 1996 were scuttled when major political parties, such as the National League of Democracy (NLD), refused to cooperate with the government, citing the futility of a process they viewed as unfairly dominated by the junta.<sup>15</sup> In 1997, although the junta was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), its policies and methods of operation remained unchanged. In the 1990 national elections, the NLD led by Aung San Suu Kyi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, won almost 80 percent of the votes. Even so, the government has ignored the election results and has held her under house arrest on charges of instigating anti-government rallies. While the international community has repeatedly called for reconciliatory dialogue between the SPDC and the various political parties in Myanmar, one of the greatest hurdles is the establishment of trust and respect between all parties, including ethnic minority parties.

The repressive political climate has been the concern of Western nations as well as for ASEAN. Although this has little direct impact on the regional stability of Southeast Asia, ASEAN has been pressured by the US and the EU to take tougher actions against Myanmar. As a result, persuading that country to liberalize its political climate will need to be a long term goal for ASEAN. Optimistically, the ability of the association

to persuade change in that country will only improve ASEAN's international reputation and ease the occasional critique against "constructive engagement."

Myanmar is socially complex. Myanmar is made up of at least eight major ethnic groups that are unique in their heritage, ancestry, language, and religion. Myint-U notes that although the country is mostly *Theravada* Buddhist, with a majority of the Burman population and the ruling regime sharing many of the same beliefs and attitudes, minority groups such as the Kachin, Shan and Karen are believers in other faiths including Christianity, or tribal beliefs.<sup>16</sup> The varied religious and ethnic background of the Burmese population adds complexity to the country's internal dynamics. Furthermore, the ethnic rivalry that began during the time of Myanmar's monarchy has not been resolved, creating a fragmented society that is more aligned to ethnic identities than to a national identity.

It is important to briefly explain some major beliefs that underlie the Burmese psyche. Bunge and Ferguson present a good introduction to the Burmese culture and society.<sup>17</sup> In their book, they explain the Burmese world view and describe the Burmese belief in *Karma* and the Burmese attitude of *Anade*. Derived from the Buddhist doctrine of spiritual credit, ordinary Burmese believe that their present lot in life is caused primarily by their attitudes and behaviors in a previous life. They believe in life after death and that their fate in the next life is determined by how they have lived their current life. The belief in *Karma* is so strong for most Burmese that it has significant impact on the motivations and psyche of the individual and the state. The belief in *Karma* is a major reason why Buddhist monks in the country are revered, play a significant role in

society, and wield moral power strong enough to rival the military might of the *Tatmadaw*.

Bunge and Ferguson also explain *Anade*, a complex attitude that seeks harmony and avoids direct confrontation or disagreement, predicated on an implicit knowledge of one's social standing. Due to its broad definition, it can also lead one to "save face" or preserve one's reputation in potentially embarrassing situations, and reject offers of assistance in order to avoid owing a debt of kindness to another. On top of these religious beliefs, the Burmese, especially its military generals, are superstitious. Decisions based on superstitious beliefs are present in their history and policies. These include officially declaring independence from the British at four in the morning, and probably one of the strangest policies of adopting an eight-day week, with Wednesdays counting as two days!<sup>18</sup> This enigmatic behavior may account for the rationale and attitudes of the Burmese, their political groups, and at times, the SPDC as well. A recent example of this unusual psyche is the sudden move of its capital city on 6 November 2005, complete with its government departments and staff, from Yangon (previously known as Rangoon) to Pinyinmana (also known as Nay Pyi Taw).<sup>19</sup>

Other than unusual beliefs and ethnic rivalry, there are other social concerns within Myanmar. The government attempts to indoctrinate the population in socialist ideologies in an apparent effort to take precedence over building a common national identity. However, since the implementation of these ideas in the public schools, Myanmar's education standards have fallen dramatically. Furthermore, Owen remarked that today university education is no longer an important qualification for success in Myanmar. Attempts to control liberal thought and democratic ideas in its universities

have led to a massive brain drain from the country since the pro-democracy demonstrations of 1988. Organized crime is rampant in the countryside, particularly in the areas of human trafficking and the production of narcotics.

This complex social fabric and the unique attitude of the Burmese will have an impact on ASEAN's efforts to engage Myanmar. For any diplomatic efforts to be successful, the association may have to consider not only the interests of the military junta, but also understand their philosophy and approach as well. Furthermore, this insular attitude toward foreign relations will require even greater effort by ASEAN to ensure that country remains engaged with the international community. The lack of attention paid to this area could be one reason why foreign policies toward Myanmar are not as effective. In addition, these foreign policies could be hampered by the existing political rivalry within the Burmese society. On the other hand, these internal challenges also provide opportunities for ASEAN member states to collectively offer their experience and expertise in governance to Myanmar. Social policies that have been successful in harmonizing various ethnic groups or good education policies could be introduced by other ASEAN members to help improve the Burmese society. In the long term, these policies could help to reduce the junta's anxiety over foreign involvement and may lead to a less restrictive political climate.

The various social problems in Myanmar have contributed to its tense current internal security situation. Armed minority factions, such as the Karen People's Army, continue to seek political independence through the use of force against the government. As part of their counterinsurgency efforts, the Myanmar government has adopted a policy of repression and forced deportation of ethnic minorities. Human rights abuses, such as

the use of child soldiers, rape, and killing ethnic minorities have resulted in approximately 700,000 Karen refugees fleeing across the border into Thailand. Incursions by Myanmar's troops chasing fleeing refugees have led to occasional border clashes over the years between the two neighbors. These clashes, together with the humanitarian burden shouldered by Thailand, may escalate into greater hostilities if left unchecked. The unstable internal security environment of Myanmar, especially in the highlands occupied by the minority tribal groups, clearly presents significant sovereignty and security challenges. To its credit, however, it must be recognized that the government successfully brokered ceasefire agreements with almost all the insurgent forces in 1990.<sup>20</sup> As such, armed conflict in general between the government and most rebel groups has decreased significantly since the ceasefire in 1990. Unfortunately, some armed rebels have turned from opposing government forces to running lucrative drug cartels in Myanmar's eastern highlands. Nevertheless, the ceasefire agreements are positive indications that the potential for national reconciliation exists.

ASEAN has no means to cause national reconciliation within Myanmar, or help that country manage its internal affairs. However, history has often shown that lasting improvements can only be achieved if its security situation is benign. Furthermore, any escalation of violence or dissension within Myanmar may spill over into regional countries, as shown in the September 2007 riots. ASEAN may therefore need to consider ways to help facilitate dialogue between opposing factions and help the junta reduce friction points within their country.

Another challenge facing Myanmar is its economy. That country has been classified by the United Nations as one of the poorest in the world, with an estimated

annual GDP per capita of US\$1,800, compared to approximately US\$44,000 in the USA.<sup>21</sup> The US Department of State estimates an even lower GDP per capita, at a meager US\$147.<sup>22</sup> This is partly due to the aftereffects of failed socialist economic policies in the 1960s, which led to the accumulation of national debt amounting to almost \$7 billion. Consequently, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) decided to cease financing loans to Myanmar.<sup>23</sup> However, its overdrawn line of credit may not be a significant problem. Due to its geographical location between India and China, its position at the western mouth of the Straits of Malacca, and the potential of undiscovered natural resources, Myanmar is aggressively wooed as a trading partner by China, India, Japan, and ASEAN. This is one of the reasons why economic sanctions have little impact against the ruling junta. Conversely, Myint-U, Katanyuu and Turnell have argued that the economic sanctions and suspension of aid by western countries have done considerable damage to the subsistence living of the common folk in Myanmar, as opposed to the ruling regime.<sup>24,25</sup>

Regardless of the application of sanctions, some analysts such as Owen argue that due to poor governance and alleged corruption in the central and local governments, wealth distribution to the common people will continue to remain insufficient and thus unable to alleviate Myanmar's social ills and economic poverty. Myint-U further suggests that one reason for the SPDC's unsuccessful domestic policies is their rejection of advice from Burmese subject matter experts in the area of economic and national development. Despite its failures, Myint-U argues that the military government desires progress for the country, but without a vision of democracy, coupled with the desire for continued military rule and the lack of expertise in governance, all fueled by international

isolation, the junta is content with the status quo.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, its short term economic reforms at the turn of the century resulted in an average economic growth rate of 7 percent which may be due to an extremely weak economic starting base.<sup>27</sup> However, some observers comment that bulk of these investments will only feed into the pockets of the ruling junta rather than benefit the Burmese. It also remains to be seen if the current economy will survive the fresh sanctions imposed by the west after the September 2007 crackdown, although most analysts expect the economic and political situation to remain unchanged.

Myanmar's political situation is closely intertwined with its economic progress. Although it is currently performing poorly, that country has the potential to revive its economy. Over the years, sanctions have shown their futility in changing government policies primarily because the junta has other options of generating revenue for the country. However, sanctions have significantly affected the livelihood of the common folk. ASEAN should consider not adopting such tough but ineffective policies toward Myanmar. Rather, the association should direct its efforts to help that country develop better wealth distribution policies and social assistance programs.

This section has briefly introduced Myanmar and the domestic challenges that exist. As suggested by Myint-U, the magnitude and complexities of these challenges may be too overwhelming for the junta to address, and may have caused them to focus even less on foreign relations. While many of these challenges do not impact ASEAN directly, some have negative second-order effects, in particular with respect to transnational crime, and the pressure that the association faces from the West. Clearly, there are many issues such as national reconciliation that are beyond ASEAN's current



ability to influence or resolve. However, they offer the association opportunities for diplomatic engagement by assisting Myanmar to resolve these problems. This would benefit that country directly and stem the development of other higher-order effects that may disrupt regional stability.

### Internal Stakeholders

There are numerous stakeholders in Myanmar who play a significant role in the stability of that country. The primary actors are the SPDC, who are the governing military junta, the NLD who are their main political opponents, and the democratically elected party of the 1990 national elections, as well as the military who are also known as the *Tatmadaw*. Other stakeholders in Myanmar include the ethnic minority political groups, Myanmar's Buddhist Monks, the scattered Burmese Diaspora, its civilian population, and the past and current university students. ASEAN will have to consider working with these stakeholders if the association intends to offer assistance to Myanmar. This section will briefly describe these stakeholders and the role they play in that country.

Due to their monopoly of power, the SPDC is the political gateway into Myanmar. As such, ASEAN will have to work with the leaders of this party to continue diplomatic engagements. Not much is known about the SPDC beyond the fact that most of its members are drawn from the military ranks. Other than citing regime survival as a primary motivation for staying in power, detailed analysis on other possible motives and governing strategy of the SPDC are limited too. Chan highlights four priorities of the ruling regime in his thesis in 1998: an economic drive to close the gap between Myanmar and its Southeast Asian neighbors, political effort to enhance the legitimacy of the regime in the eyes of its population and the rest of the world, national unity, and

counterinsurgency operations against its minorities while seeking China's continued support.<sup>28</sup> In addition, Chan also identifies a number of areas of potential collaboration, such as counter-narcotics operations along its border with Thailand, economic development, political recognition, and transfer of nation-building expertise. These areas of collaboration may provide some avenues of diplomatic cooperation for ASEAN with Myanmar.

The role of the *Tatmadaw* is extremely significant, and ASEAN may have to consider working with them if the association intends to pursue further collaboration. Since 1962, the military has become the key player in the country, not only responsible for preserving its sovereignty, but also for executing governmental functions, including the forceful suppression of any public dissent. The military has become known for its brutality against political dissidents and other opponents, especially the minority insurgents in the mountain ranges located along the periphery of Myanmar.

Myint-U and Aung-Thwin have suggested that the *Tatmadaw* has taken upon itself the duty to restore order in the country and to prevent its fragmented political and social pieces from further deterioration.<sup>29</sup> Their ultranationalist attitudes could be seen during the 1988 riots. When General Ne Win stepped down from power during that year, he gave this chilly warning: "When the army shoots, it shoots straight."<sup>30</sup> On 8 September 1988, a date auspicious to the Burmese, a series of massive street protests involving almost 100,000 civilians, mostly university students and workers, took place in Rangoon and other cities. Named the "Four Eights" demonstrations after its date, 8.8.88, Ne Win's warnings came to pass. As pro-democracy protests increased and countrywide strikes and demonstrations caused a massive breakdown in governmental and economic

functions, the military reacted, firing on demonstrators and even doctors and nurses who attempted to mediate the violence.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, Myint-U suggests that the *Tatmadaw*'s xenophobia and anti-western outlook may be a reaction to its turbulent past and colonial subjection. In his book, The Rivers of Lost Footsteps, Myint-U adds that "by the 1990s the military was the state." According to a New York Times report, the Army views itself as a protector of Myanmar's sovereignty and engine of governance.<sup>32</sup> The report suggests that the *Tatmadaw*, consisting of approximately 400,000 troops, is one of the most experienced armed forces in Southeast Asia due to its long experience conducting counterinsurgency operations.

Since the recent crackdown, other sources, such as military officers who have defected report widespread dissatisfaction, fear, and morale issues in the ranks.<sup>33</sup> These debilitating conditions are probably caused by the harsh living and working conditions, a collective heavy conscience for attacks on Buddhist monks, and strict discipline. In addition, despite its experience as an armed force, the *Tatmadaw* may not be as well-equipped or disciplined as many armies. It can be observed on video newscasts that some soldiers deployed to quell the street protests during the 2007 crackdown were wearing sandals instead of boots. Nevertheless, a conservative perspective is the *Tatmadaw* reputation as a credible force that continues to exist both in the country and throughout the region. Hypothetically, even if ASEAN or any foreign power considers military coercion toward Myanmar, this approach will almost assuredly neither achieve a swift victory nor restore stability in Myanmar.

Many commentators have argued that as a linchpin of governance and security, the *Tatmadaw* must be a major player in all reconciliatory and diplomatic efforts with Myanmar. This brief introduction to Myanmar's fragile history provides some insight into the complexities that exist in this country today, particular the role the military has taken with regard to governance. Since the country was taken over by the military, most of its key governmental functions and leadership are held by *Tatmadaw* officers. Myint-U opines that despite its authoritarian nature, the *Tatmadaw* will be a significant stakeholder in national reconciliatory efforts and most likely continued governance of the country, at least until a complete transition to civilian rule is possible. Until this transition is complete, it is possible to expect the civil service in Myanmar to have an attitude just like the *Tatmadaw*, authoritarian and uncompromising. This may pose some challenges to ASEAN's efforts of engagement and assistance.

Just as the *Tatmadaw* is the country's security backbone, Myanmar's Buddhist monks form its spiritual and cultural backbone. Since the monarchy was defeated by the British, the Burmese have sought spiritual leadership and hope from their Buddhist clergy. Buddhist monks wield considerable influence over the lives and conscience of the common folk, as well as the ordinary Buddhist soldier. Since the violent crackdown against the *Sangha*, the Buddhist brotherhood of monks, some members of the military have sought forgiveness from the monks and reconciliation in an attempt to reverse spiritual demerits accumulated for their misdeeds.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, many Buddhist monks continue to remain imprisoned for their role in the riot. ASEAN should consider working with the Buddhist institution and the junta, particularly in the areas of developing social assistance programs such as schools and clinics for the Burmese.

Although most of Myanmar's ethnic minorities have not had armed conflict with the central government for many years, the country is far from national reconciliation. Some minority groups such as the Karen and Shan, seek political autonomy while others only seek fair representation in the government. Due to government resettlement policies and attacks, many ethnic minorities have become refugees in Thailand, or are internally displaced within Myanmar. Although the central government has been lauded for their efforts to eradicate narcotics production in Myanmar, some hill tribes are forced to continue poppy cultivation. This is primarily due to the lack of economic substitutes caused by poor infrastructure and access to markets to sell legitimate crops.<sup>35</sup> To facilitate national reconciliation, ASEAN could offer to mediate disagreements between the government and these groups or reduce dissatisfaction of minority groups by coordinating humanitarian and reconstruction assistance programs in their home regions. Furthermore, ASEAN could help reduce the production of narcotics in Myanmar by opening up alternate markets for the remote hill tribes. Reducing the security tensions in Myanmar will be a major step forward in that country, which will eventually translate to a more stable Southeast Asia.

Finally, three major civilian groups form the remaining stakeholders in Myanmar: the Burmese Diaspora, who are the largest source of foreign lobbying and financial support to their families in Myanmar; the Burmese; and the student leadership of the "Four Eights" demonstration who continue to carry the burden and vision of democratic reform in Myanmar. All these civilian groups play a significant role in Myanmar's journey toward democracy, possibly playing a lead role in the country's governance should there be a transition from a military regime to a civilian government.<sup>36</sup> ASEAN

could assist the junta and the ordinary Burmese by tapping on the resources and connections of the Burmese Diaspora to help with Myanmar's national development efforts.

Due to this fragmented political climate, the main challenge facing ASEAN and the international community is access to these stakeholders, especially NLD's Secretary-General Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. As mentioned, due to their grip on power, the SPDC is the gateway to the other parties in Myanmar. In the past, the SPDC has demonstrated reclusion in their foreign relations, as well as the lack of cooperation with intergovernmental bodies such as the UN. An example was its refusal to allow the previous UN Envoy to Myanmar, Razali Ismail, to visit Daw Aung San Suu Kyi when she was under house arrest. This reclusive behavior may be due to the cultural trait of *Anade*, which was described earlier. Although it would be tempting to diplomatically isolate the SPDC and avoid interaction with them because of their reputation, efforts to influence change in Myanmar could be better served by continued diplomatic engagement.

Although there are many domestic stakeholders who may facilitate change in the country, Myint-U makes a good point in his book that "what is altogether missing is a history of pragmatic and rigorous policy debate, on economics, finance, health care, or education as well as a more imaginative and empathetic discussion of minority rights and shared identities in modern Burmese society."<sup>37</sup> This shows that not only is the military junta unsure and unable to resolve its country's problems, there are not many in Myanmar who have better ideas to address the complexities in their country. This presents a great opportunity for ASEAN to influence change in Myanmar by employing

its successful member states to assist that country in crafting better economic and other domestic policies.

### International Concerns and Myanmar's Foreign Relations

Amongst the various issues that plague Myanmar, of primary concern to the international community are its poor human rights record and suppression of democratic freedom. In addition, there are concerns regarding Myanmar's ability to counter a variety of transnational threats and pandemics, such as narcotics production and trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and containing the spread of avian influenza.<sup>38</sup> In a report on Myanmar by the UN Commissioner for Human Rights (2003), evidence of human rights violations, particularly in ethnic minority areas, continue to accumulate and the suspected perpetrators remain unpunished.<sup>39</sup> The internment of NLD's Secretary General Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under house arrest for a total of more than 12 years, continues to draw negative international attention focused on Myanmar's autocratic rulers. Despite her party's landslide victory at the 1990 National Elections, the military government refused to recognize the election results and the elected parliament has not convened since.

Due to these concerns, the West has been strongly critical of Myanmar. European countries and the US have denounced the SPDC for its human rights abuses and repressive political policies. Since the junta's annulment of the 1990 elections, the West has imposed economic sanctions and a policy of diplomatic isolation toward Myanmar. Furthermore, they have demanded the release of Daw Aung San and other political prisoners. Nevertheless, the latest EU and US economic sanctions are inherently porous

and self-defeating, in that they provide exceptions with respect to their respective investments in Myanmar's energy sector amounting to approximately \$647 million.<sup>40</sup>

Besides receiving pressure from the West, Myanmar has also been criticized by its closest allies, China and other ASEAN member states, especially after the crackdown on protestors in September 2007. Japan is also a close ally that has provided much economic assistance in the past in order to balance Sino-Indian rivalry in Myanmar. In spite of this, the fatal shooting of a Japanese journalist by the *Tatmadaw* in the recent crackdown compelled Japan to consider rescinding economic aid to the country.<sup>41</sup>

Despite being isolated from Western powers, Myanmar has active foreign relations with various countries. During less turbulent times, Myanmar has had close relationships with its neighbor, India and China, as well as the countries in Southeast Asia. China is its major supplier of military hardware and largest trading partner.<sup>42</sup> Owen highlighted that China has been providing economic assistance to Myanmar since the 1950s.<sup>43</sup> India has even kept silent despite Myanmar's use of violence in the September 2007 riots. As a potential security and economic ally to balance China, India may be taking great diplomatic precautions not to lose a friendship it has been cultivating for many years. Despite their opposition to the government of Myanmar, the EU has allocated €65 million from 2007 to 2013 to support humanitarian operations in the country.<sup>44</sup> Myanmar has other close foreign relations with some countries which are not publicized. Russia has offered to develop nuclear capabilities for Myanmar, and Israel is reported to be a close partner in defense-related issues.<sup>45</sup> Countries in ASEAN, especially its closest neighbors, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, have investments in Myanmar which contribute significantly to its economy.<sup>46</sup>



Although Myanmar's membership in ASEAN has many advantages for the region, it has also presented the association with challenges. Since becoming an ASEAN member in 1997, Myanmar has made efforts to improve its previously insular attitude toward the international community. For instance, recognizing the external pressures ASEAN might face from the US and EU if it took up the rotational appointment of ASEAN Chairmanship, Myanmar voluntarily declined its scheduled turn as ASEAN Chairman.<sup>47</sup> As a member of ASEAN, that country has made commendable efforts to build up its credibility by releasing of some political detainees and orchestrating counter-narcotics policies that provided villagers with alternative cash crops.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, after it declined to assume the ASEAN Chairmanship, Myanmar has appeared diplomatically withdrawn from the association. Evidence of this behavior is its movement of the entire capital without the courtesy of so much as an explanation to its closest neighbors. While there have been numerous diplomatic missions by countries in ASEAN to Myanmar, requests for reforms have not been heeded. As mentioned earlier, the association has had to endure criticism as a result of the domestic situation within that nation, too.

Although the riots of September 2007 have resulted in negative repercussions for Myanmar, they have not been significant enough for the junta to consider change. Furthermore, tough diplomatic actions against that country, such as isolation by the West, have done little to influence its domestic policies because of the relations it has with non-Western aligned nations. Conversely, instead of Myanmar feeling the heat of international disapproval, ASEAN has been on the receiving end of criticisms and pressure. This is another example of the second-order effects that Myanmar's problems

have on ASEAN, which have to be addressed if that country is to remain a member of the association. The next section will describe ASEAN and opinions concerning its relationship with Myanmar in more detail.

### Constructive or Destructive Engagement?

As a relatively young intergovernmental organization, ASEAN has made big strides in maintaining geopolitical stability in Southeast Asia. Ganesan presents a succinct introduction to ASEAN's founding considerations, and offers numerous examples of the ASEAN way and its uniqueness in international affairs.<sup>49</sup> In his article, he explains that the association came into existence in 1967 after a period of tense political relations between Indonesia, under President Sukarno, and her immediate neighbors, Malaysia and Singapore. After Sukarno was removed from power, the five founding members of ASEAN - Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, agreed to create a regional cooperative with a charter of non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states.<sup>50</sup> The Bangkok Declaration of 1967 presents the details of this charter as well as the original aims and purposes of the organization. It is important to note that this approach of "minding one's own business" plays a crucial role in preventing a repeat of overt confrontation in the region which was in the case with Sukarno's policy of *Konfrontasi* with Singapore and Malaysia in the 1960s. In addition, the charter also aims to deter the clandestine support for insurgencies within the ASEAN community.

Over the years, ASEAN has practiced a unique style of diplomacy known as the "ASEAN Way." Emphasizing the importance of dialogue and consultation, or *musyawarah* (*deliberation*) and *Muafakat* (*consensus*),<sup>51</sup> ASEAN members have

accommodated differences in outstanding issues, particular those that do not weigh heavily on the sovereignty of member states, rather than adopt aggressive and speedy diplomatic methods of conflict resolution. In essence, it is a diplomatic approach that is fundamentally based on the norms and intricacies of Southeast Asian cultures, and it has occasionally baffled analysts who adopt a western frame of reference with respect to diplomacy to judge its workings and effectiveness.

Regional solidarity and the ASEAN way eventually attracted five other countries - Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia, to join the association. Since its inception, ASEAN's objectives and significance have grown, propelling the organization and the region into greater international importance. In the recent years, ASEAN has sought to expand its charter from economic and social cooperation to include the protection of human rights in the region. These initiatives are described in the ASEAN Vision 2020 document as well as the new ASEAN Charter that is in the process of being ratified by all member states. It is important to note that despite recent criticisms involving ASEAN's irrelevance, violent conflict between countries in Southeast Asia has not erupted since the establishment of the association.

Therefore, it can be seen that the "ASEAN Way" of consultation and dialogue is a crucial aspect of maintaining regional security and stability in Southeast Asia. Not only does it strive to avoid confrontation between countries in the region, it does so in a manner that is acceptable to the cultural norms of Southeast Asians. This indigenous style of diplomacy could allay the xenophobia of Myanmar's junta and may stand a better chance of influencing that country. In addition, not only is the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" measured based on how well this approach resolves

Myanmar's internal problems, it must be measured by how well it meets the security dynamics of Southeast Asia, too.

Although the association has tried to engage Myanmar over the years, it has been under much criticism for its seemingly soft stance of “constructive engagement” with the ruling generals of that country. Due to Myanmar's continued disregard for human rights and political freedom, ASEAN's continued friendship has brought into question the relevance of the ASEAN Charter in resolving humanitarian problems and other disagreements between member states. To a lesser degree, ASEAN's limited effectiveness in encouraging change in Myanmar also brings into question the relevance of the organization itself. This is ironic, as other than Myanmar's membership in the UN, its membership in ASEAN remains the only relationship the insular state has with a collective group of economically successful democratic countries. Furthermore, ASEAN meets regularly with nations outside the region, such as the US and China. The West and other invited countries could use such opportunities to negotiate and influence Myanmar toward change too. In his book, Myint-U writes that isolating one of the most isolated countries in this world is counterproductive and dangerous. In addition, he advises that in isolation, “the army will simply and quite confidently push forward its agenda.”

Analysts offer a number of reasons why Myanmar was accepted into ASEAN despite that country's volatile political situation and the junta's rejection of the country's democratically elected leaders. Mydans opines that ASEAN had to include Myanmar in its membership in order to prevent the country from “sinking too deeply into China's orbit.”<sup>52</sup> In his article, he added that ASEAN hoped membership would nudge Myanmar toward “greater democracy and openness” and, optimistically, illustrate the association's

effectiveness in dealing with military dictators. Sukhumbhand Paribatra, Thailand's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs during Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai's administration, explains that Myanmar's membership in ASEAN was a combination of ASEAN's desire to include all ten Southeast Asian nations in its membership in order to achieve greater regional cooperation, as well as balance the possibly negative effects of western isolation toward Myanmar.<sup>53</sup> Bearing in mind ASEAN's fundamental purpose as a trade alliance and its overt commitment to its policy of non-interference in the affairs of member states, Myanmar's membership into ASEAN was officially accepted as long as the country agreed to subscribe to all of ASEAN's Declarations, Treaties, and Agreements.<sup>54</sup> On the July 23 1997, Myanmar officially became the ninth member of ASEAN, ahead of Cambodia, whose application for membership was put on hold due to the 1997 coup in the country. Geopolitical considerations continue to play a role in keeping Myanmar's membership in the association.

Since Myanmar's inclusion into ASEAN, the association has been faced with diplomatic pressure from the west to encourage reform in Myanmar. Through ASEAN's "constructive engagement" process, Myanmar has demonstrated some improvements in the recent years. It has released political prisoners, crafted a seven point roadmap toward democracy (SPRTD), instituted a crop substitution program, and conducted reconciliatory meetings between the military junta and Myanmar's opposition parties, as highlighted by Owen. Nevertheless, there remain many goals that the junta has to fulfill on its path to full-fledged democracy. Furthermore, some have criticized these improvements as only token gestures that lack the substance of true reform. For instance, although the junta claims to have completed drafting a new constitution, the third

milestone of the SPRTD, it was essentially a unilateral process with little consideration for the opinions of its political opponents and ethnic minorities.<sup>55</sup> Additionally, Katanyuu highlights that one of the main reason for slow progress of the SPRTD is the absence of specific dates or a timeline for reaching its various milestones.<sup>56</sup>

There are the advocates who argue that ASEAN's method of "constructive engagement" remains the only hope for the situation in Myanmar. They think that the effects of western sanctions have not only been ineffective in reforming the government, but also that they have produced unintended adverse effects on Myanmar's local population. Furthermore, they argue that western sanctions and diplomatic isolation have pushed Myanmar further away from the international community, whilst its larger Asian neighbors such as China and India continue to adopt a stance of non-interference.<sup>57</sup> Katanyuu's article suggests the need for ASEAN's cooperation with China to gain greater diplomatic leverage against Myanmar, and advocates ASEAN's departure from its sacrosanct approach of non-interference. Other supporters include the UN Special Envoy to Myanmar, Professor Gambari,<sup>58</sup> and journalists Kumar and Stuart-Fox.<sup>59</sup> In November 2007, the US Senate unanimously voted to urge ASEAN to suspend Myanmar's membership until it improves its human rights record.<sup>60</sup> While this recommendation clearly highlights the close relations between ASEAN and Myanmar, it does not address the delicate political situation and the adverse effects that would be generated if Myanmar is completely isolated from the community of democratic nations. In addition, these suggestions show a failure to recognize ASEAN's original and primary purpose of existence, and that its performance in encouraging reform with Myanmar has yet to be surpassed by the UN or any other organization in the world.

On the other hand, most opinions regarding ASEAN's effectiveness in dealing with Myanmar are that it is yielding limited success. Critics opine that ASEAN is totally incapable of extracting change from Myanmar, with some going as far as to question the relevance of ASEAN as a political alliance. Others suggest ASEAN has the capability to influence change in Myanmar, primarily due to the country's dependence on its economic investments, but have failed to fully exploit this avenue of approach because of potential financial and political losses. The ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), made up of legislators from some ASEAN member states, has repeatedly called for the junta's expulsion.<sup>61</sup> The AIPMC have argued that the association's reputation has been tarnished by Myanmar's violent acts and repressive policies. Although the association is in the process of passing a new ASEAN Charter that will include the protection of human rights, critics have pointed out that this new document does not spell out punitive measures such as embargoes, sanctions, or expulsion for violations of these clauses. Although the association has recently established a security cooperation accord, this grouping is primarily focused on defense cooperation as opposed to policing action within the region. Clearly, criticisms against "constructive engagement" have not been unfounded and ASEAN will have to address these deficiencies in order to become more effective in persuading change in Myanmar.

Even as ASEAN tries to engage Myanmar, relations between Myanmar and ASEAN appeared to have cooled even before the September 2007 riots. The country's unexpected relocation of its capital caught the association by surprise. Its reluctance to accept international aid for the areas of its country hit by the 2004 Tsunami dumbfounded many.<sup>62</sup> As the junta became more insular and unresponsive, neighboring countries such

as Singapore, Thailand, and Malaysia departed slightly from ASEAN's docile diplomacy to open criticism and persuasion. Ganesan notes, however, that this has been with very little success. This lack of success is largely due to the constraints imposed by the fundamental ASEAN principles espoused in the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and the absence of political and economic leveraging mechanisms, such as sanctions or the use of force. The inability of ASEAN to set Myanmar on a path toward democracy has led critics such as Bayuni to suggest that ASEAN's consultative approach is cumbersome<sup>63</sup> and ineffective.<sup>64</sup> In addition, the critics have argued that far from being incapable of pushing Myanmar toward reform, ASEAN is unwilling to exercise greater pressure due to economic reasons. Individually, some ASEAN countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand have investments in Myanmar or depend on Myanmar for critical resources, in particular energy supplies. For instance, although Singapore's approximately US\$684 million worth of trade with Myanmar is only 0.1 percent of the island nation's total trade,<sup>65</sup> it is one of Myanmar's largest investors next to China.

During the regional security seminar in 2007, Singapore's Prime Minister and current Chairman of ASEAN, Lee Hsien Loong, aptly summarized the association's predicament in working with Myanmar:

*"Myanmar is a problem, it is a problem for ASEAN, and it is a problem for Myanmar itself. We have exercised our influence, persuaded, encouraged, cajoled the authorities in Myanmar to move, adjust and adapt to the world which is leaving them behind. The impact has been limited, they have overriding domestic concerns which must be forcing them to act the way they do."*<sup>66</sup>



Both advocates and critics base their measures of effectiveness for ASEAN's approach toward Myanmar on a number of issues including: (1) SPDC's treatment of political prisoners and pro-democracy demonstrators, (2) the release of political detainees, in particular Daw Aung San, (3) reciprocity in the junta's foreign policy, and (4) improvements in humanitarian abuses and other social issues in the country. These focal points are some of the possible milestones that ASEAN can use to measure Myanmar's progress toward reform. It was observed that advocates tend to highlight the regional sensitivities and political goals that necessitate "constructive engagement," while critics discuss the possible vested interests ASEAN members may have that hinder the development of more effective measures of interaction with Myanmar.

Without a doubt, ASEAN has limited authority and means to influence change in Myanmar. Not only will creativity be required to overcome these limitations, there is also a need for the association to have greater conviction in seeking change in Myanmar. Although successful "constructive engagement" is challenging, there are numerous opportunities to influence change in that country, such as through assistance programs and trade. Furthermore, there is a need to establish diplomatic metrics that will indicate the effectiveness of any approach ASEAN is taking toward Myanmar. These metrics could be designed to measure the effectiveness of diplomacy toward that country from the perspective of the Southeast Asian nations, the international community and the Burmese. Therefore, this study will adopt these three perspectives in its analysis of "constructive engagement."

### Other Diplomatic Approaches

As ASEAN adopts “constructive engagement,” other countries have chosen to engage Myanmar differently. The US and EU have imposed economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation on the country in the hope that it will buckle under pressure and be hastened to reform.<sup>67</sup> As expected, this has led to strain in the relations between Myanmar and Western nations. The latest crackdown on protestors has led to even more “targeted sanctions” by the US and the EU against the country’s leadership, such as travel bans and freezing of overseas assets. Australia also imposed similar measures to target the ruling junta and their families. The effectiveness of sanctions is debatable. In addition to applying sanctions on Myanmar, western countries have exerted diplomatic pressure on ASEAN, as well as India, China, and Japan, to influence Myanmar’s reformation efforts. Seen as a proxy tactic by some observers, not only has this approach failed to produce fruit, in some ways it has exacerbated the lack of international solidarity in confronting Myanmar. Opinions have been raised theorizing Myanmar’s abhorrence for what it perceives to be a US “Cubanization Policy” toward Myanmar. Furthermore, western businesses that have ceased investments in Myanmar have left thousands of factory workers unemployed.

In the area of sanctions, some analysts argue that instead of pressuring the ruling generals to reform, they have hurt the common folk. Businesses, particularly those in the garment and textile industry, have withdrawn investments from Myanmar that have resulted in thousands of factory workers losing their jobs. In response to the question of sanctions against Myanmar, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong gave the following analysis:

*"First of all, this is a country which wants to isolate itself from the world, so they are not afraid of you cutting them off. Secondly, if you want to have sanctions, it cannot just be Singapore or even ASEAN, but all of the countries in the world have to do that, and that includes the Western countries, investors in Myanmar and its neighbors like China with big stake in Myanmar. And thirdly, if you do have sanctions and it worked, I think the people who will be hurt by the sanctions will not be the regime or the SPDC, the government, but the people of Myanmar, so it will be counter productive."*<sup>68</sup>

On the other hand, many Asian countries have taken an opposite approach from sanctions and isolation. China, Japan, and India have been actively pursuing Myanmar's friendship for security and economic benefits. Regardless of sanctions or dialogue, Myanmar's government remains unperturbed. In Green's testimony to the US Congress, he highlights Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's reservations about the effectiveness of Japan's economic aid in encouraging Myanmar towards democratic reform.<sup>69</sup> After years of failed promises and slow reform by the Myanmar government, its allies are beginning to lose patience and confidence in the SPDC.

ASEAN is not alone in its frustrations with Myanmar. Although it is possible for the association to work with other like-minded nations to influence Myanmar, it has to weigh the political trade-offs. On one hand, there will be greater negotiation power with Myanmar especially if China or Japan is involved. On the other hand, such a coercive approach could be seen as a contradiction of the consensus policy that has been the hallmark of the association's style of diplomacy.

## The United Nation's Approach after September 2007 Crackdown

The literature review for this thesis has revealed a spread of opinion regarding constructive engagement versus economic sanctions. In addition, it has also revealed that the majority of the information presented in news reports favors the use of sanctions, whilst selectively publishing information that insinuates apathy and collusion in countries that advocate other diplomatic approaches. A number of authors suggest a balanced approach of threatening tough disincentives in tandem with closer dialogue and persuasion. In addition, there are a number of views supporting a multilateral approach by the international community, as opposed to separate engagements by individual countries. The combined application of sanctions, proxy tactics, and aid has been advocated by a number of American analysts such as Falco et. al., Green, and Green and Mitchell.<sup>70,71,72</sup> A major practitioner of this multinational, balanced approach in dealing with Myanmar has been the UN.

After the government's crackdown on protestors in September 2007, the UN has stepped up efforts to facilitate national reconciliation and ensure Myanmar continues its journey of democratic reform. Professor Ibrahim Gambari, UN Under-Secretary General and Special Envoy for Myanmar, highlighted the importance of ASEAN working with the UN in facilitating reform in Myanmar.<sup>73</sup> Since September 2007, the UN has taken the lead working with Myanmar. It is important to note that so far no country has proposed military intervention.

### Summary and Conclusion

There are many problems in Myanmar which have caused much international concern. Furthermore, these problems may be too complex for the SPDC to resolve, and

may possibly require assistance from foreign nations and organizations. Some of these problems such as the internal instability of the country and its criminal activities, could create second order problems for ASEAN. One of these second order effects is the pressure that ASEAN receives from within and outside the region urging the association to take stronger action against Myanmar. Although some member states within the association have begun to openly comment on that country's acts of violence and other policies, ASEAN's overall attitudes toward Myanmar continues to be one of tolerance. A major reason could be the potential economic and geopolitical value that the association attaches to that country.

ASEAN faces many challenges as it works to engage Myanmar diplomatically. Despite the ASEAN's approach of "constructive engagement," Myanmar's domestic policies and progress toward democracy as outlined in the SPRTD have not been significant. Its xenophobia and culture make ASEAN's engagement with Myanmar even more challenging. Furthermore, the association has very little means to influence change in Myanmar. This has led to debates concerning the effectiveness of "constructive engagement." Some advocates of this approach argue that it is the only hope to influence Myanmar for the better, while critics call for tougher action such as economic sanctions. Regardless of the approach, influencing change will be a challenge for ASEAN because of Myanmar's neighbors. India, China, and even Russia appear keen to cultivate Myanmar's friendship without asking for political concessions.

Optimistically, there are a number of ways for ASEAN to overcome its limitations. From the literature review, it could be seen that the SPDC has difficulty in resolving all of its domestic issues due to the magnitude and complexities of these

challenges. As such, these problems may become diplomatic opportunities for the association to assist Myanmar, with the aim of influencing reform over the long term. Strengthening its economy through trade and education would not only contribute to development and stability in Southeast Asia, they would also benefit the Burmese directly.

Finally, this literature review has shown that measuring the effectiveness of constructive engagement can be complex. The association has to consider many factors which generally fall into three categories – internal opinion, regional dynamics and sensitivities, as well as the livelihood of the Burmese. As such, this thesis will adopt three perspectives that will help ascertain the effectiveness of “constructive engagement.” These perspectives are the “International” perspective, the “Regional” perspective, and the “Grassroots” perspective, which will be explored further in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. *The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Pg. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Pg. 150.

<sup>3</sup> US Department of State. *Background Note: Burma*. US Department of State website: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm>. [accessed September 29, 2007].

<sup>4</sup> Central Intelligence Agency. *CIA World Factbook – Burma*. CIA website: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html> [accessed October 13, 2007].

<sup>5</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. *The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Owen, Norman. ed. 2005. *The Emergence of Modern Southeast Asia: a New History*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press. Pp. 322-334.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Pp. 83-92.

<sup>8</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pg.. 9.

- <sup>9</sup> Ibid. Pg. 27.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid. Pp. 12-29, 190-191. Furthermore, harsh British counterinsurgency policies included public flogging of prisoners, torture and beheadings. Although they were successful in imposing civil order after the defeat of King Thibaw, these humiliating treatments contributed to the increasing hatred for colonial rule in Burma.
- <sup>11</sup> Owen, Norman. ed. 2005. Pp. 79 & 500
- <sup>12</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pp. 253 & 288.
- <sup>13</sup> Owen, Norman. ed. 2005. Pp. 497-503.
- <sup>14</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pp. 299-301.
- <sup>15</sup> International Constitutional Law Project. 2004. *Myanmar Index*. March 29. ICL website: [http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/bm\\_indx.html](http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/bm_indx.html) [accessed May 7, 2008].
- <sup>16</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pp. 194-197.
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- <sup>23</sup> US Department of State. *Background Note: Burma*. US Department of State website: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm>. [accessed January 4, 2008].

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<sup>26</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pp. 344-348.

<sup>27</sup> Ott, Marvin. 1996. *Burma: A Strategic Perspective*. Institute for National Strategic Studies: Strategic Forum. [http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SF\\_92/forum92.html](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/strforum/SF_92/forum92.html) [accessed September 2, 2007].

<sup>28</sup> Chan, Chun Sing. 1998. *Whither a Common Security for Southeast Asia?* MMAS Thesis. KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Pg. 91.

<sup>29</sup> Aung-Thwin, Maureen & Myint-U, Thant. 1992. *The Burmese Ways to Socialism*. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 1.

<sup>30</sup> BBC News. 1998. *World: Asia-Pacific Burma's ten years under the military*. September 8, BBC News website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/174046.stm> [accessed October 14, 2007].

<sup>31</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pg. 34.

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<sup>37</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. Pg 346.



<sup>38</sup> Green, Michael J. 2006. *The Strategic Implications of the Burma Problem*. Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Asia Pacific Affairs. <http://www.senate.gov/~foreign/testimony/2006/GreenTestimony060329.pdf> [accessed September 23, 2007].

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## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Never think of knowledge and wisdom as little. Seek it and store it in the mind. Note that ant-hills are built with small particles of dust, and incessantly-falling raindrops when collected can fill a big pot.

Loka Niti: Words of the Wise

#### Introduction

There is a need to adopt three perspectives in order to answer the primary research question of what ASEAN should do to improve “constructive engagement” with Myanmar. The previous chapter has presented various commentaries regarding the situation in Myanmar, as well as diplomatic approaches taken by ASEAN and other countries. The association faces many limitations and challenges as it aims to influence change in Myanmar through diplomacy. The “three perspectives” approach will allow the association to determine the effectiveness of its policy toward Myanmar. Broadly, an effective strategy should address international opinion, meet regional security concerns, and benefit the common Burmese.

This chapter will describe the research methodology by building on the major findings from the literature review before describing the research methodology and design of this thesis. Next, it will introduce the various analytical models used to redefine the problems in Myanmar, summarize the concerns of various international and domestic stakeholders, and analyze the effectiveness of ASEAN’s method of “constructive engagement.”

### Broad Research Methodology

Major findings from the literature search show that Myanmar's numerous domestic challenges may be too overwhelming for the country's leadership to address, but that they offer opportunities for ASEAN to assist that country. Although Myanmar's problems create challenges for ASEAN, it is highly advantageous for that country to remain in the association. In addition, there is a need to analyze "constructive engagement" from three perspectives.

Figure 3 shows the methodology and research design of this thesis. After the literature research, this study will answer the first secondary question by identifying potential areas where ASEAN can engage that country. To answer the second secondary question, it will utilize the three perspectives to analyze the current effectiveness of ASEAN's "constructive engagement." Finally, it will answer the primary research question by recommending changes that may strengthen its approach toward Myanmar.

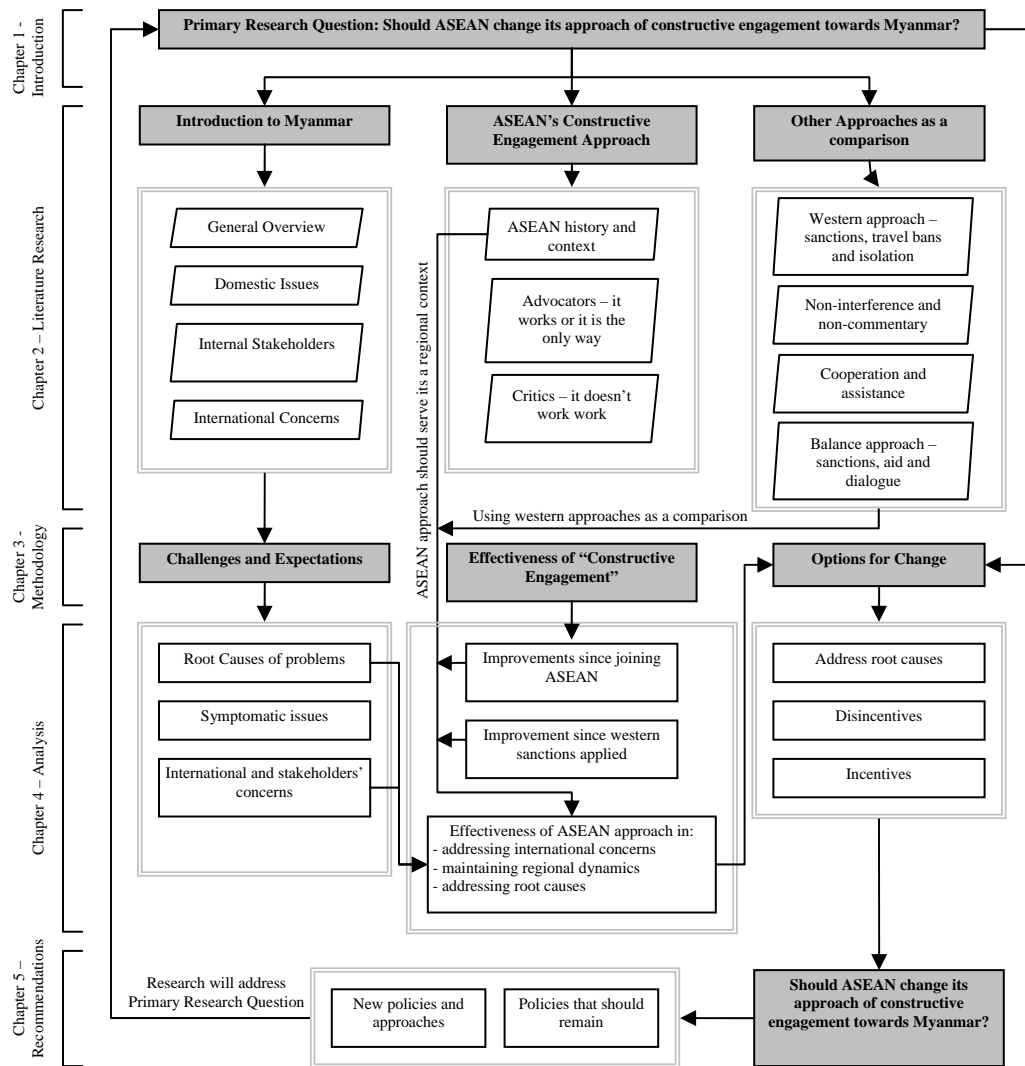


Figure 3. Thesis Methodology and Research Design.

### Analysis and Recommendations

The primary aim of Chapter 4 is to determine areas where ASEAN can assist Myanmar and the effectiveness of “constructive engagement.” This chapter will adopt a four step approach. First, it will present the various internal issues in Myanmar, their root causes, and potential areas for cooperation. Next, it will identify those issues that create international concern, as well as the interests of various domestic stakeholders in that

country. Third, it will study how well Myanmar has responded to “constructive engagement.” Finally, it will study the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” by using the three perspectives.

To determine the root causes of Myanmar’s problems, the study will analyze four aspects of that country’s society – criticism of its political climate and diplomatic policies, its social policies and human rights record, its security situation, and its economic performance. Within each aspect or category, the study will identify the issues that show dysfunctional behavior in the country (Column 1). It will then identify a root cause for each symptom (Column 2). It will then list the corresponding international concern or action that is taken by the parties concerned (Column 3). Finally, it will identify possible areas where ASEAN can assist Myanmar in solving the root cause of the problem (Column 4). A possible example could be identifying widespread poverty as a symptom of dysfunction, whose root cause may be the low education of Burmese workers. This problem may not be a concern to the international community, but it could be a potential area for ASEAN to assist Myanmar. This approach will be tabulated in the template shown in Table 1.

This process is crucial to developing not only a fresh perspective on Myanmar and its troubles but also what various stakeholders expect “constructive engagement” to achieve. The identification of root problems will facilitate the creation of effective policies aimed at tackling the root causes of Myanmar’s problems, not just its recurrent symptoms of dysfunctionality.



Table 1. Template to Classify Issues, Causes and Concerns in Myanmar.

<b>Column 1 - Dysfunctional Symptoms within Myanmar</b>	<b>Column 2 - Root Causes (Documented and Probable)</b>	<b>Column 3 - International Concerns and Ongoing Action</b>	<b>Column 4 - Areas for Cooperation and Deterrence which may Address Root Causes<sup>1</sup></b>
This column identifies various issues that are symptomatic of a dysfunctional government. These include events and issues, such as human rights violations and street protests, which occur often, but are not be the root causes of Myanmar's problems.	This column identifies documented reasons, as researched in Chapter 2, as well as possible reasons, derived by the author, for the dysfunctional symptoms identified in <b>Column 1</b> . To be effective and practical, ASEAN's "constructive engagement" approach need to tackle the root causes of Myanmar's problems.	This column identifies the concerns of the international community regarding the dysfunctional symptoms highlighted in <b>Column 1</b> . There will be some dysfunctional symptoms which receive no attention, possibly due to the lack of interest or awareness of the rest of the world. Issues in <b>Column 3</b> will facilitate analysis of whether ASEAN's "constructive engagement" approach serves to address international concerns.	Finally, this column identifies possible areas of cooperation by ASEAN and the rest of the international community to assist Myanmar in democratic reform. In addition, it will also identify possible deterrence options against problem sources identified in <b>Column 2</b> . These options may provide some ideas for ASEAN to facilitate reform in Myanmar.
<b>Category 1 - Political and Diplomatic</b>	Political and Diplomatic problems include Myanmar's internal political problems, repressive style of politics and diplomatic approach to the rest of the international community.		
<b>Category 2 - Social and Human Rights</b>	Social and Human Rights problems include allegations of human trafficking, oppression against its populace by government forces, as well as poor standards of health and national development.		
<b>Category 3 - Security</b>	Security problems include Myanmar's internal cessation movements and their concern for preserving territorial integrity.		
<b>Category 4 - Economy</b>	Economic problems include poverty of its population and other economic related issues.		

A summary of the international concerns and interests toward Myanmar is necessary to provide some metrics for the "International" perspective which will be used to study the effectiveness of "constructive engagement." In addition, it will provide indicators on how that country has responded to various diplomatic approaches. To do this, the diplomatic relations and approach of respective countries will be listed, followed by the key concerns and expectations of these countries. Finally, Myanmar's response to these diplomatic policies will be listed. A template of this table is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Template for Summarizing International Concerns and Interests toward Myanmar.

<b>Column 1 - Country and Organization</b>	<b>Column 2 - Diplomatic Relations and Approach towards Myanmar</b>	<b>Column 3 - Key Concerns with respect to Myanmar's internal issues</b>	<b>Column 4 - Goals and Expectations Toward Myanmar.</b>	<b>Column 5 - Myanmar's response to the specific country or organization</b>
This column lists the various countries and intergovernmental organizations such as ASEAN that have interests in and concerns with Myanmar.	This column presents their diplomatic relations with Myanmar and their approach such as "constructive engagement" or sanctions.	This lists the major issues the respective country or organization has with Myanmar.	This column highlights the objectives behind their selected diplomatic approach. For instance, if the country has chosen sanctions, this column highlights the articulated or documented objective or end-state of such an approach.	This lists Myanmar's performance in relation to the specified approach. It summarizes whether Myanmar has reformed with respect to such an approach or has it adopted the status quo.

Next, domestic stakeholders' interest within Myanmar, summarized in the template shown in Table 3, will be presented. A broad survey of internal stakeholders could allow ASEAN to consider the impact that parties other than the SPDC could have on "constructive engagement." Furthermore, this survey could generate ideas on how "constructive engagement" can benefit different sectors in Myanmar rather than just maintaining the regional status quo. The interests of domestic stakeholders will contribute to the metrics for the "Grassroots" perspective.

Table 3. Template for Collating Domestic Stakeholder Interests in Myanmar

<b>Column 1 - Stakeholders in Myanmar</b>	<b>Column 2 - Description and Role in Myanmar</b>	<b>Column 3 - Primary Concern / Interests (Documented)</b>	<b>Column 4 - Alleged Interests</b>	<b>Column 5 - Progress and Effectiveness in Pursuing Interests</b>
This column lists the various domestic stakeholders in Myanmar such as the SPDC or the NLD.	This column presents a brief description of the stakeholder and their role in Myanmar.	This lists their documented concerns in Myanmar.	This lists their possible interests which have no documented evidence such as regime preservation or corruption.	This list presents how successful these stakeholders are at pursuing their goals in Myanmar.

### Effectiveness of "Constructive Engagement"

While there are mainly two schools of thought regarding the future of ASEAN's "constructive engagement" approach in Myanmar, the general consensus is that ASEAN,

along with other parties, is largely ineffective in achieving fundamental reform in Myanmar. As such, a crucial part of this thesis will be to determine whether “constructive engagement” is working in Myanmar by analyzing its effectiveness according to three perspectives: an “International Perspective,” a “Regional Perspective,” and finally a “Grassroots Perspective.”

The “International” perspective will analyze the performance of “constructive engagement” in accordance with the expectations of the international community and other articulated concerns of the international community. The “Regional” Perspective will analyze “constructive engagement” according to how well it meets ASEAN’s interests for the region. It is necessary to develop these two perspectives as there may be occasions where diplomatic strategies which appear appropriate to the general international community may create regional instability. A hypothetical example would be the open support of rebel groups by another ASEAN member, a drastic departure from the ASEAN Way. This may destabilize the region as other member states may choose to depart from the principles of non-interference in the future. On the other hand, it is also necessary to determine whether the ASEAN strategy is myopic in its approach, addressing only its self-interests while ignoring its obligations to the larger global community.

The final perspective is the “Grassroots” perspective, an approach that considers neither any international norms and codes of conduct nor the ASEAN context, but purely how well “constructive engagement” has performed in addressing the domestic concerns of Myanmar, such as reducing its insurgencies and reviving a failed economy. “Constructive engagement” will be analyzed alongside western methods of influencing

another sovereign nation’s behavior, such as economic sanctions and diplomatic isolation, to provide a capability for some comparison. By juxtaposing two radically different approaches, it may be possible to develop an alternative approach that infuses elements of diplomatic disincentives with offers of consultation and assistance. Table 4 presents the template of this comparison matrix.

**Table 4. Template for Analyzing Effectiveness in Facilitating Myanmar’s Reform**

<b>Perspectives</b>	<b>The Effects of Positive Approach - ASEAN’s Constructive Engagement Approach</b>	<b>The Effects of Disincentives - Sanctions and Diplomatic Isolation</b>
<b>International Perspective</b>	Measure of Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other international concerns (see Table 6)</li> </ul>	
<b>Regional Perspective</b>	Measure of Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASEAN Charter</li> <li>• Maintain current level of stability in the regional</li> <li>• Ensure status quo or greater level of regional stability in the future</li> </ul>	
<b>Grassroots Perspective</b>	Measure of Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal concerns and issues in Myanmar (see Table 5)</li> <li>• World Bank Millennium Goals (see Table 6)</li> </ul>	

As the interests of the various stakeholders external and internal to Myanmar are explored, various options to improve “constructive engagement” will be presented. These options will support the recommendations and conclusions presented in Chapter 5 of this study. In that chapter, this study will discuss the challenges of reform in Myanmar and recommend policies ASEAN may adopt toward Myanmar to facilitate that country’s process of reform. In addition, Chapter 5 will also discuss the challenges ASEAN faces before concluding with some lessons learnt and areas for further research.

### Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has described the research methodology of this thesis by reiterating key findings from the literature review and explaining how the various research tools and

tables will answer the primary research question. To determine the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” in encouraging reform in Myanmar, this thesis will compare it against three measures of effectiveness, the “International” perspective,” the “Regional” perspective, and the “Grassroots” perspective.” To determine whether “constructive engagement” is effective in encouraging reform in Myanmar, this thesis will study different measures of effectiveness used to assess ASEAN’s approach toward Myanmar. The next chapter will present an analysis of Myanmar’s problems, determine the effectiveness of ASEAN’s “constructive engagement” approach, and propose options which ASEAN may adopt towards Myanmar.

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<sup>1</sup> Extracted from Chan. 1998 and information gathered in the literature review.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS

Come you back to Mandalay, Where the old Flotilla lay;  
Can't you 'ear their paddles clunkin' from Rangoon to Mandalay?  
On the road to Mandalay, Where the flyin'-fishes play,  
An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay!

Rudyard Kipling, Mandalay <sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Various countries and organizations in the world have different expectations of reform from the government of Myanmar. These expectations incorporate political and economic agendas that are unique to these nations and groups. As an active member in the international community, there is a need for ASEAN to extend its diplomatic considerations beyond its own organizational agenda. Therefore, the value and effectiveness of ASEAN's "constructive engagement" approach toward Myanmar needs to be measured from different perspectives to encompass the expectations of the international community, as well as from the perspective of Myanmar's domestic stakeholders.

This chapter will answer a number of questions concerning the success of "constructive engagement" by examining it from the "Regional" perspective, "International" perspective, and "Grassroots" perspective. To set the context of this study, it will first explore the complexities of nation building in Myanmar by showing that beneath the political violence in the streets lays a fragmented nation, disunited by civil war, prejudice, and the absence of effective and readily available alternatives to the present form of government. Next, it will examine the SPDC's improvements in

governance since joining ASEAN in 1997. In addition to evaluating “constructive engagement” from the ASEAN’s perspective, this chapter will also explore the expectations of the international community and the motivations of domestic stakeholders in Myanmar before concluding with a survey of options ASEAN can adopt to enhance “constructive engagement.”

### Challenges and Expectations

One of the international community’s main concerns is the alleged government-sanctioned abuses against ethnic minorities and political detainees. Calls for the military government to free political detainees, especially Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, and facilitate investigation into these allegations of abuse have not yielded the desired results. While there are numerous evidences of the military government’s harsh policies and tactics, it is important to note that the government also has many domestic concerns on its agenda, to include the need to rejuvenate the ailing economy, social disunity and crime. Of course, there is also the very real concern with survival of the regime too.

The next sub-sections will explore these issues in detail: including the different domestic challenges present in Myanmar, international concerns and interests toward Myanmar, the interests of internal stakeholders in that country, Myanmar’s progress so far, and the effectiveness of “constructive engagement.”

### Layered Issues and Differing Concerns

Years of bitter political in-fighting between the ethnic groups in Myanmar, coupled with the unchallenged military dictatorship in the country, have led to an insular and backward country beset with a number of domestic challenges. Table 5 lists the

issues that exist in Myanmar. Although the junta has endeavored over the years to improve the situation in the country, many symptoms of ineffective governance, such as political and social problems which are of concern to the rest of the international community, remain.

Underlying the symptoms causing international concern are many documented and probable root causes. From Table 5, it can be seen that the stakeholder associated with most of the problems facing the country is the military junta. Although many of the problems are either directly or indirectly caused by its policies and presence, these same problems cannot be resolved without its participation. The poor economic and social conditions are partly the result of ineffective or indifferent government policies, as well as the country's lack of financial ability due to the adverse effect of low foreign investments. There are also other causes. Insurgents and drug lords add to the chaos, violence, and oppression rampant in many parts of the country. Despite these symptoms and causes, the international community is not aligned in its interactions with Myanmar. Countries and organizations have different concerns and perspectives on the situation in Myanmar. Furthermore, these concerns are often centered on the symptoms of ineffective governance. They also tend to focus their efforts toward coercing or advising the junta, rather than a holistic approach to tackle all the parties concerned, and crafting solutions to alleviate the structural and economic deficiencies of the country. Finally, the table also suggests some possible areas of cooperation that ASEAN, together with the rest of the international community, may pursue to work with Myanmar.

Four conclusions may be drawn from Table 5. First, in the near term, ASEAN's interaction with Myanmar must involve the SPDC. With their control on virtually every



aspect of life in Myanmar, the SPDC is a key participant in “constructive engagement.” It may be effective to engage the SPDC in a sequential manner, by allaying their xenophobia and working with them to achieve their legitimate aims to develop the country. Therefore, ASEAN’s primary objective toward Myanmar should be to ensure that the ruling junta remains engaged with the association in order to facilitate assistance by the association.

Second, there is a need to work with and train alternative candidates who have the potential to hold future civil service appointments in Myanmar when the SPDC hands over power to an elected government. This will allow a readily available civilian administration to assume key government positions in place of the current military personnel as reforms proceed. To alleviate the concerns for their welfare and safety, given the repressive political attitudes of the present government, these candidates could be trained as interns outside the country or given scholarships to pursue management sciences. They could also be employed under the auspices of an ASEAN mission in Myanmar. Given the present political situation in that country, it could be feasible for ASEAN to commence training incumbent civil servants in Public Administration courses offered in the universities of various ASEAN countries.

Third, although there are ongoing investments by ASEAN member states in Myanmar, ASEAN as an organization is primarily concerned with the political situation in that country. Other than Thailand’s assistance to the refugees fleeing Myanmar, there is little involvement by other ASEAN members in addressing the humanitarian and security issues in that country. This should be improved to provide greater support to the Burmese and contribute to regional stability.

Fourth, there are many potential areas of interaction for ASEAN to engage Myanmar and gradually promote reform in the country. These include positive engagements such as continued investments, dialogue, mediation with the west, and providing training and advice for effective governance and public administration. These opportunities could provide the incentives for the ruling junta to allow foreign assistance in their country during times of peace and especially during times of crisis.

Table 5. Issues, Causes and Concerns in Myanmar.

Dysfunctional Symptoms within Myanmar that fuel International Concern	Root Causes (Documented and Probable)	International Concerns and Ongoing Action	Possible Areas for Cooperation and Deterrence which may Address Root Causes <sup>2</sup>
<b>Political and Diplomatic</b>			
Regime's reclusive and insular style of foreign relations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regime's xenophobic foreign relations outlook.</li> <li>• Regime's <b>suspicion of western intentions</b> its affairs, especially its survival and its campaign against insurgents.</li> <li>• Regime's lack of ability and diplomatic savvy to simultaneously address foreign relations and domestic issues simultaneously as suggested by Myint-U.</li> <li>• Regime's re-focus of foreign relations towards China, India and/or Russia.</li> </ul>	Possible concern to <b>ASEAN</b> and other actors who are seeking continued dialogue and diplomatic relations with Myanmar. Continuation of ASEAN's "constructive engagement."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assist the regime in gaining political and diplomatic recognition.</li> <li>• Continued Asian representation in diplomatic efforts with Myanmar.</li> <li>• Provision for continued dialogue with the junta.</li> <li>• Delicate diplomatic approach to Myanmar.</li> <li>• Provide advice or training to government leaders, and possibly alternative candidate governments.</li> </ul>
Inability to complete "Seven Point Roadmap towards Democracy"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of participation by other political groups due to allegations of the regime's monopoly of the process.</li> </ul>	Concern to <b>ASEAN</b> which seeks a measurable form of progress in Myanmar. Continued monitoring and interaction by ASEAN under the auspices of ASEAN regional meetings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate reconciliatory dialogue and negotiations between political groups.</li> <li>• International observers to aid regime's campaign for legitimacy.</li> </ul>
Annulment of 1990 National Election results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preservation of regime's power.</li> </ul>	Specific Concern to the <b>UN, US, EU</b> and other countries. Implementation of sanctions by western powers to coerce change in junta.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate reconciliatory dialogue and negotiations between political groups.</li> </ul>
Internment of Political Prisoners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preservation of regime's power.</li> <li>• Possible effort to preserve national unity.</li> <li>• Regime's suspicion of foreign subversive activities.</li> </ul>	<b>UN</b> and the rest of the international community's concerns for human rights concern. Implementation of sanctions by western powers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate reconciliatory dialogue and negotiations between political groups.</li> </ul>

Table continues on next page.

Table 5 continued.

Dysfunctional Symptoms within Myanmar that fuel International Concern	Root Causes (Documented and Probable)	International Concerns and Ongoing Action	Possible Areas for Cooperation and Deterrence which may Address Root Causes <sup>3</sup>
<b>Political and Diplomatic</b>			
Attacks on unarmed protestors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disregard for human rights.</li> <li>Disregard for human rights in the course of preserving law and order.</li> <li>Unsophisticated military security forces.</li> </ul>	International community concern for the human rights in Myanmar. Implementation of sanctions by western powers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deployment of ASEAN observers.</li> </ul>
Undisclosed relations and dealings with non-western aligned countries such as Russia and possibly North Korea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative avenues of technology and trade due to western sanctions.</li> </ul>	Little or no official statements or comments from NATO aligned powers. ASEAN interaction to balance influence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued diplomatic engagement.</li> </ul>
<b>Social and Human Rights</b>			
Human trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sophisticated human trafficking ring.</li> <li>Regime's possible lack of concern.</li> </ul>	Reported in UN and NGO reports as well as some US reports to congress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint ASEAN border patrols.</li> </ul>
Increasing HIV/AIDS infected population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of healthcare facilities and capabilities.</li> </ul>	Reported in UN and NGO reports as well as some US reports to congress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resumption of humanitarian aid.</li> </ul>
Human rights abuses, particularly on ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regime's policies of civil control.</li> <li>Rogue soldiers.</li> <li>Harsh counterinsurgency policies in response to rebel and insurgent activity.</li> </ul>	Reported in UN and NGO reports as well as some US reports to congress.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deployment of international observers.</li> </ul>
Displaced persons, particularly ethnic minorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forced relocation.</li> <li>Collateral effect of counter-insurgency battles.</li> </ul>	Reported in UN and NGO reports as well as some US reports to congress. Concern to ASEAN, in particular Thailand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater diplomatic and financial aid to assist Thailand's ongoing humanitarian relief efforts toward Myanmar's refugees.</li> </ul>
Low UN Human Development Index score	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low educational standard of population.</li> <li>Poor health of general population.</li> </ul>	Reported in UN. Economic assistance by Japan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued economic aid with measures to prevent corruption or misuse of funds.</li> <li>Provide advice or training to government leaders.</li> </ul>
<b>Security</b>			
Narcotics production and trafficking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Possible corruption and vested interest of junta.</li> <li>Ineffective anti-narcotics or crop substitution programs.</li> <li>Militant drug lords capable of defending its narcotics industry.</li> <li>Regime's lack of concern regarding the narcotics situation.</li> </ul>	Major security concern of <b>Thailand</b> and <b>China</b> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multi-national border patrols.</li> </ul>
Alleged increasing military expenditure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preservation of regime's power.</li> <li>Maintenance of national sovereignty and requirements for counter-insurgency operations.</li> </ul>	US reports have highlighted concern.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring and controlling arms sales to ensure military spending is match or surpassed by economic and social improvements.</li> </ul>
Insurgency by hill tribes seeking political autonomy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minority groups seeking autonomy.</li> <li>Harsh and unequal policies of the junta.</li> </ul>	Concern by NGOs and minority lobbyists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deploy international observers.</li> <li>Facilitate reconciliatory dialogues.</li> </ul>

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Table 5 continued.

Dysfunctional Symptoms within Myanmar that fuel International Concern	Root Causes (Documented and Probable)	International Concerns and Ongoing Action	Possible Areas for Cooperation and Deterrence which may Address Root Causes <sup>4</sup>
<b>Economy</b>			
Low GDP per capita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of investment.</li> <li>• Low educational standard.</li> <li>• Negative effects of sanctions.</li> <li>• Lack of knowledge in economic development.</li> <li>• Lack of concern by ruling junta.</li> </ul>	Little or no official statements, comments or action by the international community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continued economic investment in Myanmar.</li> <li>• Facilitate Myanmar's marketing to the rest of the international community.</li> <li>• Economic assistance predicated of measurable progress in reform.</li> </ul>

Note: The information in this table was derived from sources used in this research.

Before we can assess whether ASEAN's "constructive engagement" approach is working, there is a need to identify what exactly it is working toward and the stakeholders with whom ASEAN can work in Myanmar. Table 6 summarizes the relationships, concerns, and objectives of the international community toward the situation in Myanmar. It also summarizes Myanmar's response to these nations. Although it is an oversimplification, matching various diplomatic approaches with Myanmar's response may provide some idea how different approaches fare in encouraging reform in that country. While such analysis is extremely complex in reality, it is possible to simplistically summarize the results of this process in four points.

First, the unique concerns of the various countries and organizations examined drive the style of diplomatic approach they take toward Myanmar. To be objective, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" according to the goals and in the context of the initiating party. Second, there are common concerns of the international community. Therefore, it is possible for ASEAN to work with international partners to encourage change in Myanmar. Third, a concerted or coordinated approach taken by these actors toward Myanmar currently does not exist. This has advantages and

disadvantages in dealing with the SPDC. A collective approach will send a strong signal to the leaders of Myanmar regarding what is acceptable as a form of government, and what governmental actions are in violation of international law ratified by members of the United Nations, of which Myanmar is a member. The combined application of incentives and disincentives allows the SPDC, assuming it is a “value-maximizing” actor, to choose a course of action that will be beneficial to their aims and goals. On the other hand, the disadvantage of disparate diplomatic efforts is that they can unintentionally cancel each other out, thereby negating the intended effects of each. Fourth and finally, there is potential for ASEAN to adopt the role of a mediator between Myanmar and the rest of the world, which could be another incentive for that country to change its policies as well as allow foreign assistance.

Table 6. Summary of International Concerns toward Myanmar.

Country and Organization	Diplomatic Relations and Approach towards Myanmar	Key Concerns with respect to Myanmar’s internal issues	Goals and Expectations Toward Myanmar.	Myanmar’s response to the specific country or organization
ASEAN	<b>Cordial</b> compared to the west. Openly criticizes Myanmar’s violent and repressive methods. Welcomes Myanmar’s membership in ASEAN. Maintains an approach of “ <b>constructive engagement</b> ” with Myanmar. Some member countries, like Singapore and Thailand, have investments in Myanmar. Has been the subject of criticism and diplomatic pressure to push reform in Myanmar.	Internment of political prisoners especially Aung San Suu Kyi. Violence towards unarmed demonstrators. Lack of national unity and the avoidance of a possible civil war.	Support for Myanmar’s “Seven Point Roadmap towards Democracy (SPRTD).” Possibly keeping Myanmar’s membership to limit Chinese influence which creates some diplomatic dilemmas for the association.	Continued membership in ASEAN, although relationship with the organization has been tepid in recent years. Passed over of ASEAN Chairmanship in view of international pressures on the organization. Completing SPRTD’s first objective. Apparent restraint in September 2007’s crackdown, compared to response in 1988. Release of political prisoners.

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Table 6 continued.

Country and Organization	Diplomatic Relations and Approach towards Myanmar	Key Concerns with respect to Myanmar's internal issues	Goals and Expectations Toward Myanmar.	Myanmar's response to the specific country or organization
China	<b>Warm</b> relations with Myanmar. Adheres strictly to “ <b>non-interference and non-criticism</b> ” towards Myanmar's style of governance. Openly requested Myanmar to exercise restraint during the September 2007 demonstrations. Supplies arms and has close trade relations. Alleged Chinese installations have been constructed in Myanmar as part of China's strategic defense plans. China has also vetoed UN Security Council attempts at tougher action against Myanmar.	Cross border narcotics and human trafficking.	There is no official statement by China toward Myanmar. Possible interest in Myanmar's natural resources, the potential to construct an overland trade route to India and hedging for Myanmar's alliance possibly against India.	Myanmar has strong ties with China. It procures Chinese weapons and has allowed China to construct military installations within its country.
EU	<b>Poor</b> relations with Myanmar. Imposed <b>sanctions, travel bans and other policies of diplomatic isolation</b> towards Myanmar. Nevertheless, the EU has allocated funds to support humanitarian operations in Myanmar through NGOs. Has no direct interest in Myanmar other than investments in the energy sector by French company, Total.	Internment of political prisoners, humanitarian crises and the violent attacks on political demonstrators.	Release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, continued dialogue between the SPDC and Myanmar's opposition parties, recognition of the democratically elected leadership and cooperation with the UN. <sup>5</sup> However, France is concerned that sanctions may affect French company Total's energy investments in Myanmar.	There is minimal diplomatic dealings and responses by Myanmar toward the EU. French company, TOTAL, has investments in Myanmar's energy sector.
India	Enjoys <b>warm</b> relations with Myanmar. Ostensibly <b>silent</b> over Myanmar's repressive actions. Supplies arms and has trade relations with Myanmar. It is suggested that India is cultivating Myanmar's friendship to balance China's influence.	Nil	Trade and defense cooperation.	Close defense relations with India.
Israel	Relationship with Myanmar <b>unknown</b> . It has denied claims of weapons sales to Myanmar.		Possible weapons sales.	Unknown.
Japan	<b>Tepid</b> relations with Myanmar after shooting of a Japanese journalist in the September 2007 demonstrations. It is a major provider of <b>financial aid</b> to Myanmar though it has considered rescinding its goodwill numerous times due to Myanmar's violent and autocratic behavior.	Internment of political prisoners, humanitarian crises and the violent attacks on political demonstrators.	Possibly trade and defense cooperation.	Accepts Japanese aid.
North Korea	Relationship <b>unknown</b> . Alleged arms supplier to Myanmar.	Unknown.	Unknown.	Unknown.

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Table 6 continued.

Country and Organization	Diplomatic Relations and Approach towards Myanmar	Key Concerns with respect to Myanmar's internal issues	Goals and Expectations Toward Myanmar.	Myanmar's response to the specific country or organization
Russia	Relations with Myanmar may be considered <b>warm</b> as Russia is reported to be <b>providing technical assistance</b> for Myanmar's nuclear power program. Together with China, it has vetoed UN Security Council attempts at tougher action against Myanmar.		Trade and defense cooperation.	Unknown.
Thailand	Its <b>cordial</b> relations with Myanmar may have cooled slightly since the ouster of the Thaksin administration. Thailand has been <b>silent</b> over Myanmar's repressive nature and it depends heavily on energy imports from Myanmar.	Human and narcotics trafficking. Refugee flow.	Border control and management of refugees.	Occasional border clashes in the course of counterinsurgency operations.
Singapore	Singapore has <b>cordial</b> relations with Myanmar. Individually and as ASEAN's current Chair, it has voiced displeasure over Myanmar's use of force in the September 2007 crackdown, and supports the need for " <b>constructive engagement.</b> " Singapore had supplied arms to Myanmar and has investments which are significant to Myanmar. Myanmar's leaders frequently fly in to Singapore for medical treatment.	Singapore had expressed regret over Myanmar's violent attacks on political demonstrators.	Policy modernization and trade.	Myanmar's leaders continue to visit Singapore for medical treatment.
UN	The UN has <b>cordial</b> relations with Myanmar. After the September 2007 crackdown, UN Envoy to Myanmar has been heavily involved in facilitating national reconciliation in Myanmar and have employed a <b>balanced approach</b> of threatening stiffer action, possibly sanctions, yet actively engaging Myanmar through dialogue.	Human rights violations	Release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and allow the deployment of UN and humanitarian observers.	Myanmar has worked closely with the UN, especially after the September 2007 crackdown.
USA	The US is <b>vehemently against</b> Myanmar's ruling junta. It has imposed the heaviest diplomatic and economic penalties on Myanmar, including three declarations of <b>sanctions</b> , as well as the implementation of <b>travel bans and policies of diplomatic isolation</b> . While sanctions prevent US companies from establishing new investments in Myanmar, it excludes Myanmar's energy sector where the US has substantial investments in the French company, Total, which is working in Myanmar.	Internment of political prisoners and suppression of democratic freedom.	Release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.	Myanmar has not responded directly to US diplomatic actions.

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Table 6 continued.

Country and Organization	Diplomatic Relations and Approach towards Myanmar	Key Concerns with respect to Myanmar's internal issues	Goals and Expectations Toward Myanmar.	Myanmar's response to the specific country or organization
World Bank	The World bank has <b>poor</b> relations with Myanmar. It has <b>ceased financial aid</b> to Myanmar, other than its ongoing Avian Influenza support, due to its lack of economic and domestic reforms.	Its ability for loan repayment.	Summary of Millennium Goals include <sup>6</sup> : 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. 2. Achieve universal primary education. 3. Promote gender equality and empower women. 4. Reduce child mortality. 5. Improve maternal health. 6. Combat AIDs and other diseases. 7. Ensure environmental sustainability. 8. Develop a global partnership for development.	According to the World Development Indicators Database, Myanmar has made improvements to numerous areas of measure since 1990 in areas such as improving water supply, improving the literacy rate of youths and reducing undernourishment of children. There is room for improvement in the area of fighting tuberculosis and improving the mortality rate of infants.

Note: The information in this table was derived from sources used in this research.

In addition to external powers who are able to influence change in Myanmar, there are many stakeholders within the country. ASEAN could work with these stakeholders as well as the SPDC in order to facilitate reform. There are three requirements for this initiative to succeed. First, there is a need to ensure that the SPDC is open to foreign assistance from ASEAN. This could be achieved by offering more incentives for “constructive engagement,” such as foreign assistance in governance, aid and trade. Second, for the country to be stable and effective, there is a need for trained civilian leaders to assume government functions when the transition to a democratic civilian government becomes possible. As mentioned earlier, ASEAN may facilitate this requirement by training or advising members of an alternate candidate government, possibly the NCGUB, as well as incumbent office holders in Myanmar. Third, to achieve



stable and lasting reform, it is necessary for the stakeholders inside Myanmar to establish political unity and determine a vision and form for their country.

Table 7. Summary of Domestic Stakeholder Interests in Myanmar.

Stakeholders in Myanmar	Description and Role in Myanmar	Primary Concern / Interests (Documented)	Alleged Interests	Progress and Effectiveness in Pursuing Interests
<b>State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).</b> Chairman of SPDC – Senior General Than Shwe. Prime Minister – Thein Sien.	Ruling military junta. Seized power in 1988 after Gen Ne Win's resignation. Originally named State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and renamed SPDC in 1997. Governs country and controls virtually every aspect of the society in Myanmar.	Regime survival. Ensure Myanmar's continued survival as a nation. Preserve sovereignty of country.	Involvement with drug cartels. Establish national unity.	Gradual improvements in economy and domestic situation since 1988. Release of political prisoners but not key figures like Aung San Suu Kyi. Brokered ceasefire with rebel groups. Drafted SPRTD 1998 although only the first milestone has been achieved.
<b>National League of Democracy (NLD).</b> Secretary-General – Aung San Suu Kyi.	Major opposition party in Myanmar. Won approximately 80% of the votes in the 1990 National Elections which was annulled by the SPDC.	Democracy in Myanmar. Economic and other reforms.	Viewed as subversive elements by SPDC.	Since the 1990 National Elections, key party members have either been arrested or are in exile. After the September 2007 demonstrations, the NLD has met with the SPDC a number of times for reconciliatory dialogue, under the mediation of the UN. The NLD has strong support from the international community.
<b>National Coalition Government of the Union of Myanmar (NCGUB).</b> Prime Minister Elect in exile – Dr. Sein Win	Exiled government of Myanmar after the annulment of the 1990 National Elections.	Democracy in Myanmar. Economic and other reforms.		Coordinates international support for the pro-democracy struggle in Myanmar. Despite being democratically elected, it receives less recognition as Myanmar's de facto government, compared to the SPDC.
<b>Military (Tatmadaw).</b>	As the military and executive arm of the SPDC, the <i>Tatmadaw</i> is responsible for a variety of functions from maintaining law and order in the country, to national defense, as well as the management of essential functions of national governance. Virtually all of Myanmar's ministers and senior government officials are generals. It is widely accused of executing majority of the human rights violations in Myanmar.	Execute SPDC policies.	Views itself as guardian of Myanmar's sovereignty and unity.	Its violent methods of suppression have been successful in quelling separatist movements as well as expressions of public dissent towards the government. Since the 2007 demonstrations, army deserters report troop discontent and guilt over its attack on demonstrating Buddhist monks.
<b>Ethnic Minority Groups.</b>	A variety of political parties representing their individual ethnic minority groups. The Karen political party, Karen National Union (KNU) is outlawed by the government. The KNU has organized armed resistance as an alternative to the lack of democratic representation of their cause.	Democratic representation in Myanmar's parliament. Some ethnic groups, such as the Karen, seek greater government autonomy in their home region.		Ceasefire brokered with SPDC. These minority hill tribes are subjected to numerous human rights abuses.

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Table 7 continued.

Stakeholders in Myanmar	Description and Role in Myanmar	Primary Concern / Interests (Documented)	Alleged Interests	Progress and Effectiveness in Pursuing Interests
<b>Rebel groups.</b>	There are numerous minority hill tribes fighting for political independence from Myanmar's central government. Primarily rooted in ethnic rivalry, these minority rebel groups have had a long history of discontent with the Burmese authorities even before the 20 <sup>th</sup> century. Since the ceasefire in 1990, some rebel groups have turned to cultivating narcotics.	Independence or greater political autonomy for their home region.		Although a major ceasefire agreement was signed by most minority rebel groups, there are ongoing clashes between the <i>Tatmadaw</i> and some rebels such as the Karen and Shan.
<b>The "88" Student Generation.</b>	These dissidents are the politically active remnants of the student body that participated in the 1988 riots in Myanmar. While some may still be residing in Myanmar, it is likely that most are living outside the country to avoid persecution by the SPDC. Being more educated than many officials in the SPDC and the government, there is a potential for these activist to serve their country in public administration positions should Myanmar revert to civilian rule.	A democratic form of government.		Since the 1988 crackdown, this generation of political activists have had limited success to effect change in Myanmar.
<b>Burmese Diaspora.</b>	Living and working outside Myanmar are a large number of Myanmar nationals. Ranging from expatriates and professionals to refugees and dissidents, many hold a strong conviction to seek reform in Myanmar.	The livelihood of their families in Myanmar.	Possibly political change in Myanmar.	Politically, there are a significant number of high profile citizens who have the ability to lobby international support to deal with the problems in Myanmar. Financially, many families in Myanmar are supported by the income remitted by Burmese expatriates, possibly contributing significantly to alleviate greater social inconsonance.
<b>Buddhist Monks.</b>	Commanding the respect and adoration of the population in Myanmar are almost half a million Buddhist Monks. <sup>7</sup> Analysts believe that given their high spiritual and moral standing in the country, this monastic order ( <i>Samgha</i> ) can be a significant challenge to the military if fully politicized.	Spiritual pursuits.	A small percentage of the monks are concerned with the political situation in the country.	Since they provide significant moral encouragement to Myanmar's civilians, monastic participation in political demonstrations usually result in heated confrontations, international interest, eventual violence, but ultimately little change in the internal situation of the country.
<b>Civilian Population.</b>	Majority of Myanmar's civilian population live below the poverty line. Due to the poor economic conditions of the country, many seek out a subsistence living or are forced to leave the country to work.			While a small number of civilians, particularly the educated sector of the population, have participated in anti-government demonstrations, they have unable to collectively remove the government from power.

Note: The information in this table was derived from sources used in this research.

Tables 5 to 7 show that (1) "constructive engagement" meets ASEAN's regional economic and security interests, (2) this approach needs be improved to address concerns

by the international community which are not of primary interest to ASEAN, and (3) there is a need for the association to work with the SPDC to resolve Myanmar's problems. In addition to ASEAN's lack of means to influence change in that country, this study has also found other challenges facing the association's efforts in working with Myanmar.

### ASEAN's Challenges of Working with Myanmar

Although there are many avenues of cooperation ASEAN can pursue with Myanmar, the association faces numerous challenges in encouraging reform. First, as shown in the previous section, Myanmar's internal problems are complex. While it is possible for ASEAN to assist and advise the SPDC on good governing practices, it is limited in resolving ethnic and political rivalry within the country. Furthermore, the SPDC's absolute control over all aspects of Myanmar and the absence of legal authority by foreign powers, such as ASEAN or the UN, makes it difficult to compel the government to improve humanitarian problems or free political prisoners in Myanmar.

Second, ASEAN is bound by its policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of member states. Although ASEAN has recently made public statements requesting Myanmar to exercise restraint in its control of demonstrators and to cooperate with UN authorities, it remains moderate in its approach. With its focus on economic cooperation and regional integration, ASEAN remains cautious not to stir up excessive diplomatic tension within the organization and the region.

Third, due to the lack of a concerted approach by the international community to encourage Myanmar's reform, the effects of ASEAN's diplomatic efforts may be countered by the actions of other countries or organizations. Even if ASEAN has the

means to apply deterrent or incentive measures toward Myanmar, other countries may work against these measures by proposing counteroffers that would meet their individual national interests. For instance, the continued and possibly increased supply of arms and economic investment by China and India to Myanmar is very likely if ASEAN adopts a more isolationist economic stance to compel the SPDC to reform.

### Constructive, But Is It Effective?

So far, the study has explored numerous reasons for ASEAN to continue its ongoing diplomatic efforts with Myanmar. This section will examine the extent of ASEAN's success in encouraging reform in that country. .

Figure 4 highlights major media reports concerning Myanmar's political and national security developments during two periods, ten years prior to Myanmar joining ASEAN and ten years after. These developments are divided into four categories and are centered on the primary concerns of the international community: Dialogue and Talks, Political Violence and Security Clashes, Political Prisoners Released, and Political Prisoners Arrested. These events provide an indication of whether the situation in the country is moving toward a desirable end-state or remaining status quo. While recognizing that this method of measurement drastically simplifies the political situation in Myanmar and that the lack of data may mean unreported information as opposed to the absence of an event, it is still possible to draw a number of conclusions. First, there has been more dialogue between the SPDC and the opposition parties since Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997. Second, the government has released some political prisoners since 1997, and there has been progress in narcotics control. Third, the information gathered shows a possible decrease in civilian casualties resulting from political demonstrations.

However, it is acknowledged that there could be even more unreported arrests and casualties, too. Fourth, there is an ongoing insurgency in the country which has not been resolved. Fifth and finally, “constructive engagement” has failed to persuade Myanmar to release high-profile opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.

A significant problem concerning the measurement of ASEAN’s effectiveness is the coincidental application of sanctions by the West. It is difficult to ascertain whether deterrent actions such as sanctions or “constructive engagement” are responsible for the developments in Myanmar. It is very likely that the combined application of disincentives and positive approaches has led the junta to adopt measures to change their policies for the better.

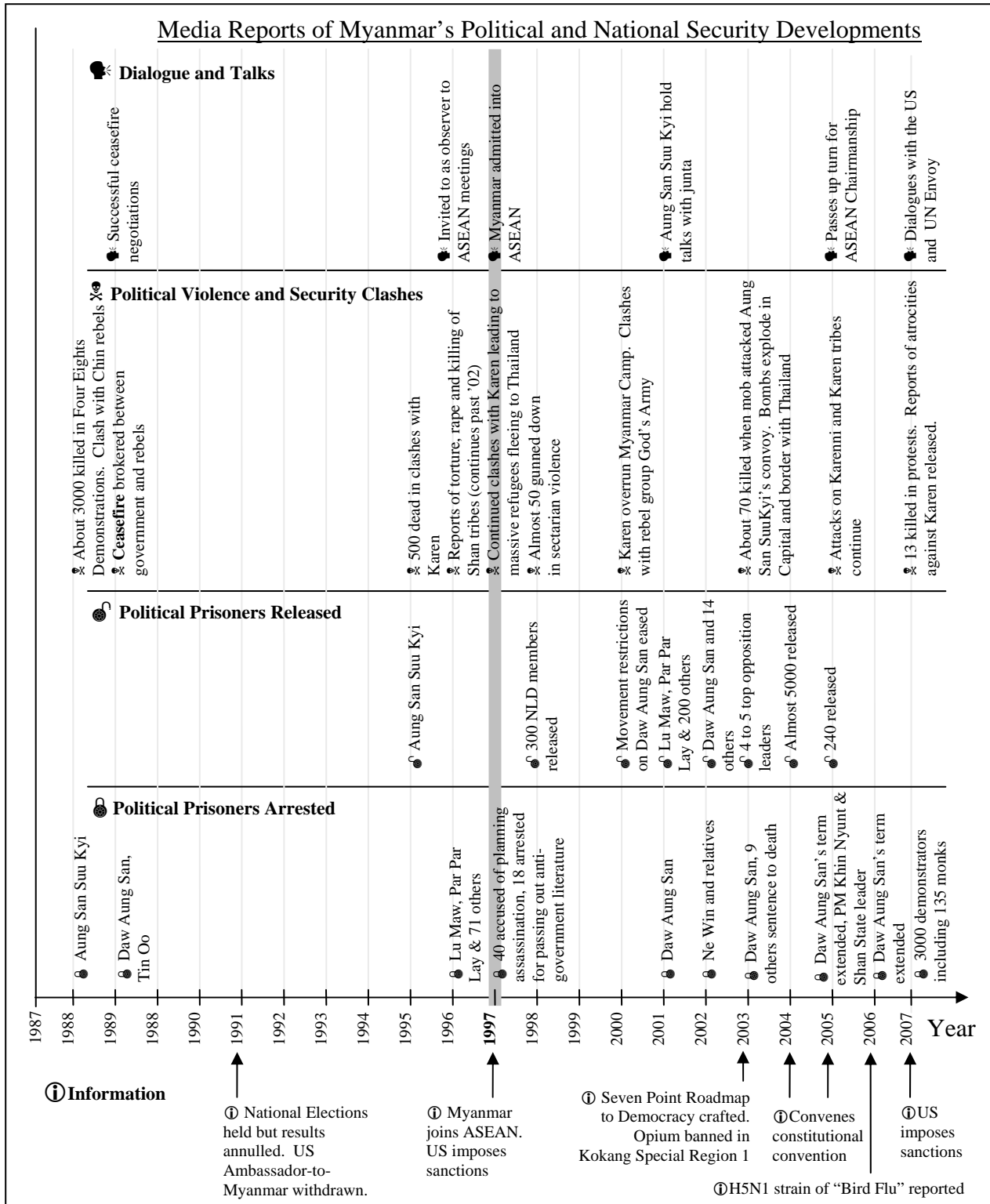


Figure 4. Summary of Media Reports Covering the Political and National Security Developments in Myanmar from various sources.<sup>8</sup>

The effectiveness of continued interaction with Myanmar, though not necessarily “constructive engagement,” compared to western sanctions was examined by studying Myanmar’s Gross Domestic Production (GDP) from 1980 to 2006 as illustrated in Figure 5. There are numerous debates regarding the limitations of GDP in showing the actual economic situation of a country.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, it provides a rough indication of economic progress and other economic effects. Figure 5 shows that despite the application of western sanctions, Myanmar’s GDP has almost doubled since joining ASEAN. The effectiveness of “constructive engagement” on Myanmar’s economy remains inconclusive due to the activities of other investors, such as China and Japan. However, it is reasonable to conclude that Myanmar stands to gain from continued foreign investments, which in turn makes foreign investment and diplomatic engagement an effective tool to leverage change in the country.

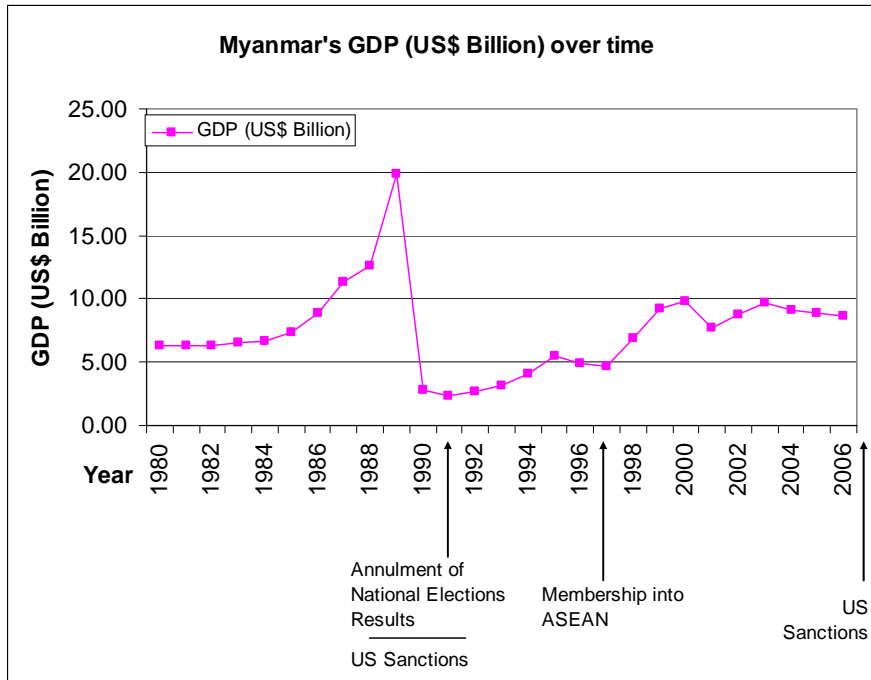


Figure 5. Myanmar’s GDP (US\$ Billion) over time from EconStats website.<sup>10</sup>

Numerous development indicators compiled by the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have shown many improvements in Myanmar as well as areas that require improvement. Significant areas of progress include the decline in narcotics cultivation and the undernourishment of children. However, due to the simultaneous application of sanctions and “constructive engagement,” this study has not been able to determine if ASEAN is solely responsible in influencing the change in Myanmar’s internal situation.

In the process of collective economic development, ASEAN has to ensure that all member states are given the opportunity to progress. Table 8 shows that Myanmar is not the only country in Southeast Asia that requires economic and other assistance to keep pace with the region’s dynamic growth. It also shows that for the association to be equitable in addressing grassroots concerns, it needs to assist all its weaker member states and not just Myanmar. Hence, one of ASEAN’s concerns that the topic of Myanmar does not dominate ASEAN’s agenda is definitely valid.

Table 8. A Selective Comparison of ASEAN’s Most Recent Member States.

<b>Selected Development Indicators from UNDP</b>	<b>Myanmar</b>	<b>Laos</b>	<b>Vietnam</b>	<b>Cambodia</b>
GDP per capita PPP (US\$) (2005)	1,027	2,039	3,071	2,727
Human Development Index (HDI) (2005)	0.583	0.601	0.733	0.598
HDI Ranking (2005)	132	130	105	131
Life Expectancy at Birth (yrs) (2005)	60.8	63.2	58.0	73.7
% of Government Expenditure on Education (%) (2002-05)	18.1	11.7	~9.0	14.6
Armed Forces (,000) (2007)	375	29	455	124

Note: The information in this table was derived from sources used in this research.

Table 9 summarizes the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” from three perspectives. The effectiveness of sanctions and diplomatic isolation was also studied in



order to provide a benchmark. There are four conclusions from this survey. First, from the “International” perspective, both “constructive engagement” and diplomatic isolation have made little progress in improving the political and humanitarian situation in Myanmar. Since ASEAN’s charter limits intervention in the internal affairs of its member states, the association has very little means to pressure Myanmar to address key concerns of the international community. Although diplomatic restrictions aimed at principal leaders of the SPDC send a stronger political message, it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of such actions on the intended targets. While “constructive engagement” provides an avenue for ASEAN to encourage change in Myanmar, it is an approach that may project an image of collusion or agreement with the junta. Likewise, with the coincidental application of diplomatic isolation, it is difficult to attribute success to either approach should any political improvements occur in Myanmar. A significant milestone, however, is Myanmar’s endorsement of a new ASEAN charter incorporating the protection of human rights. In light of the fact that Myanmar is run by a military dictatorship, this is an incredible achievement by the association.

Second, it is the belief of ASEAN states that a policy of “constructive engagement” is more effective in achieving regional integration than a policy of isolation. Although the application of selective sanctions and diplomatic isolation by the west has not affected the regional dynamics in Southeast Asia, it has shown that such an approach severely strains the diplomatic relations between Myanmar and western powers. Should ASEAN seek to adopt such a stance, it could potentially create disunity within the association and possibly tension in the region. In addition, the application of sanctions may have contributed to Myanmar seeking cooperation from non-western aligned

powers. This approach, if adopted by ASEAN, will create similar effects that may potentially draw Myanmar deeper into China's influence, a major concern of ASEAN members. Therefore, "constructive engagement" has better prospects of serving ASEAN's interest to improve regional stability in Southeast Asia.

Third, both "constructive engagement" and sanctions are not significant enough to improve the socio-economic situation in Myanmar. Although investments by ASEAN member states in Myanmar are a major contribution to the Burmese economy, it is unclear how these investments positively impact the general population. Sanctions, on the other hand, have not only cut the flow of foreign investments to Myanmar, in some instances they have resulted in job losses in Myanmar's manufacturing sector, adversely impacting not the junta but the general population. Despite the sanctions, western powers have allocated humanitarian aid and assistance to the country through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Red Cross. "Constructive engagement" in the form of foreign investment by ASEAN states should continue but with a particular emphasis on ensuring even wealth distribution or improving public infrastructure. Further, more proactive assistance by ASEAN toward the people of Myanmar can be a significant improvement to "constructive engagement." However, the challenges of utilizing business investments to create social and political change are recognized and will be briefly discussed in the next chapter.

Fourth, the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" can only be measured based on the perspective adopted. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that "constructive engagement" is effective from the "Regional" perspective but needs improvement from the "International" and "Grassroots" perspective. Such a distinction will allow the

association to retain aspects of the policy which are workable and selectively enhance other aspects it can effect in Myanmar.

Table 9. Measures of Effectiveness.

Perspectives	The Effects of Positive Engagement - ASEAN's Constructive Engagement Approach	The Effects of Disincentives - Sanctions and Diplomatic Isolation
<b>International Perspective</b>		
<b>Specific Areas of Concern</b>	Measure of Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International concerns (see Table 6)</li> </ul>	
Human rights abuses	Myanmar has signed a new ASEAN charter incorporating the protection of human rights. Although critics have highlighted the lack of measures to enforce compliance, the ability of the association to convince a military regime to sign a human rights agreement is seen to be an incredible achievement by advocates of "constructive engagement." There is no evidence that "constructive engagement" has contributed to improving the human rights situation in Myanmar.	There is little evidence to link the application of sanctions with the improvement in human rights in Myanmar.
Release of political prisoners, particularly Daw Aung San Suu Kyi.	Over the years, ASEAN has refrained from openly discussing Myanmar's internal political situation. It is unclear whether such discussions have been conducted privately during ASEAN meetings, although it may be possible. Again, there is no evidence to show how "constructive engagement" has contributed to the release of political prisoners in Myanmar.	Both the US and the EU have demanded the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest to no avail.
Democratic elections	Although the association has influenced the junta to develop their "Seven Point Roadmap Towards Democracy," there is little evidence to indicate "constructive engagement" has influenced the decision for Myanmar to plan a national election around 2010.	The US and the EU have called for the SPDC to recognize the national election results of 1990. There is no evidence that Myanmar has considered these disincentives to plan for a national election in 2010.
<b>Regional Perspective</b>		
<b>Specific Areas of Concern</b>	Measure of Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ASEAN Charter</li> <li>• Maintain current level of stability in the regional</li> <li>• Ensure status quo or greater level of regional stability in the future</li> </ul>	
Non-interference	In the recent years, some ASEAN members have openly expressed dismay regarding the situation in Myanmar, particularly during the 2007 anti-government demonstrations. This, however, has not caused ASEAN members to depart from this previously sacrosanct policy toward each other.	The application of sanctions and diplomatic isolation by countries outside Southeast Asia against Myanmar has not affected ASEAN's policy of non-intervention.
Regional Stability and Solidarity	Regular ASEAN meetings have allowed other members to ASEAN to interact with Myanmar's leaders and possibly influence change. As a show of solidarity, ASEAN leaders have announced their support for Myanmar against the US Senate's urges to suspend Myanmar from the association.	Calls to suspend Myanmar from the association have been rejected by ASEAN members.
Potential for future cooperation	There is no evidence to indicate current economic investments by ASEAN member states in Myanmar have the potential for future cooperation and integration, especially when the country has improved its infrastructure.	There are very little historical examples to show how economic activity has been affected by previously adversarial countries.

Table continues on next page.

Table 9 continued.

Perspectives	The Effects of Positive Engagement - ASEAN's Constructive Engagement Approach	The Effects of Disincentives - Sanctions and Diplomatic Isolation
<b>Grassroots Perspective</b>		
<b>Specific Areas of Concern</b>	Measure of Effectiveness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal concerns and issues in Myanmar (see Table 5)</li> <li>• World Bank Millennium Goals (see Table 6)</li> </ul>	
Economic growth	While there are investments by some ASEAN member states in Myanmar, their impact on the overall economy of the country is inconclusive.	Other than existing investments in the energy sector, sanctions have restricted and encouraged western investors to withdraw their business in Myanmar. Thousands of jobs have been reportedly lost, especially from the tourism and manufacturing sectors.
Elements of the Human Development Index (HDI)	There is little humanitarian assistance by ASEAN toward Myanmar, other than the political asylum provided by Thailand to Myanmar's refugees.	Despite the application of sanctions, western powers have allocated humanitarian aid and assistance through NGOs to assist the people of Myanmar.

Note: The information in this table was derived from sources used in this research.

### Should ASEAN Change its “Constructive Engagement” Approach?

So far, the study has explored the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” from three points of view. It has shown that from a regional perspective, “constructive engagement” serves the security and economic needs of ASEAN by working with Myanmar to strengthen Southeast Asian solidarity and stability. ASEAN is most likely to believe that not only that continued interaction with the SPDC is crucial to ensure maintain regional cohesion, but that ultimately the internal situation within Myanmar also has to be stable. A politically, socially, and economically stable Myanmar contributes significantly to the economic development in the region. Such conditions also set the stage for a stable security environment not only within Southeast Asia, but between the region and the adjoining Asian superpowers of China and India. Therefore, from the “Regional” perspective, there are no compelling reasons for ASEAN to abandon “constructive engagement” toward Myanmar.

There is a need, however, to improve the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” in order to achieve greater success from the “International” and

“Grassroots” perspectives. One of the primary assumptions of this study is that ASEAN is keen to improve its international standing. There are two possible reasons for this. First, from a security perspective, China’s increasing military power necessitated a unified approach by these resource rich Southeast Asian nations to engage with and hedge against its larger neighbor.<sup>11</sup> This has led to the formation of security and defense related forums within ASEAN to promote regional stability as well as defense cooperation amongst member states. Secondly, from an economic perspective, the integration of the European markets, and the rising Chinese and Indian economies required a collective approach in order for ASEAN member states to remain competitive.<sup>12</sup> Without credibility and a respectable international standing, the association’s efforts to remain secure and economically competitive may be significantly affected.<sup>13</sup>

From the “International” perspective, ASEAN has both a vested interest and a responsibility to alleviate international concerns toward the situation in Myanmar. As part of developing and maintaining a respectable international standing, the association has to demonstrate greater social responsibility with regard to Myanmar’s internal situation. While it is not possible to tackle all the international concerns within the country, it is possible to work with numerous stakeholders within and outside Myanmar to address issues and root causes that may significantly affect the region and the lives of the people in Myanmar.

Ultimately, any altruistic diplomatic intervention, assistance, or protests toward Myanmar by the rest of the world must be aimed at improving the lives of the innocent and the oppressed. Without considering the living standards of the population as a

measure of effectiveness, “constructive engagement” aimed at improving ASEAN’s international standing and maintaining regional stability would not only be a self-defeating attempt, it would run contrary to ASEAN’s charter and vision of promoting peace and prosperity in the region.

### Summary and Conclusion

The current conditions in Myanmar significantly affect ASEAN’s identity as well as its goals and aspirations. Although ASEAN operates on the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of its member states for reasons of regional stability, it is challenged to encourage reform in the country for the sake of being economically competitive and internationally credible. This chapter has explored in detail the nature and causes of the problems in Myanmar, the international community’s concern regarding the situation in Myanmar and interests of various stakeholders in the country. This survey has provided more clarity on the country and the possible areas ASEAN may interact and influence. This study has not been able to determine the exact effectiveness of ASEAN’s influence in Myanmar due to the coincidental application of disincentives, such as sanctions, when the country was admitted into the association in 1997. It has, however, been able to show that “constructive engagement” works to meet ASEAN’s goals of preserving regional stability and economic development. Furthermore, there is a need for ASEAN to ensure the SPDC remains open to foreign assistance. Nevertheless, there is a need to refine “constructive engagement” in order to be more successful from an “International” and “Grassroots” perspective. ASEAN has both a vested interest and a responsibility to spearhead change in Myanmar.

Building on the analyses presented in this chapter, Chapter Five discusses various possibilities for ASEAN to improve “constructive engagement” from all three perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> Kipling, Rudyard. *Mandalay*.  
<http://raysweb.net/poems/mandalay/mandalay.html> [accessed November 2, 2007].

<sup>2</sup> Extracted from Chan (1998) and information gathered in the literature review.

<sup>3</sup> Extracted from Chan (1998) and information gathered in the literature review.

<sup>4</sup> Extracted from Chan (1998) and information gathered in the literature review.

<sup>5</sup> The European Parliament. 2007. *European Parliament resolution of 27 September 2007 on Burma*. September 27. European Parliament website:  
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0420+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN> [accessed February 17, 2008].

<sup>6</sup> World Bank. *Millenium Development Goals – Myanmar*. World Bank website:  
[http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?&CF=&REPORT\\_ID=1336&REQUEST\\_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED](http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/ddpreports/ViewSharedReport?&CF=&REPORT_ID=1336&REQUEST_TYPE=VIEWADVANCED) [accessed February 17, 2008].

<sup>7</sup> Buckley, Sarah. *Who are Burma’s Monks?* September 26, 2007. BBC News website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7014173.stm> [accessed February 17, 2008].

<sup>8</sup> Compiled from *Timeline Myanmar [formerly Burma]*. Timelines of History website: <http://timelines.ws/countries/BURMA.HTML> [accessed January 6, 2008], *Myanmar (Burma) Timeline*. January 7, 2008. World News Map website: <http://www.mapreport.com/countries/myanmar.html> [accessed January 8, 2008] and *Timeline Burma – A Chronology of Key Events*. October 12, 2007. BBC news website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/1300082.stm> [accessed January 8, 2008].

<sup>9</sup> Heilbroner, Robert and Thurow, Lester. 1998. *Economics Explained – Everything you need to know about how the economy works and where its going*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. Pp 77 – 80.

<sup>10</sup> Data points obtained from Econ Stats. EconStats website:  
<http://66.221.89.50/weo/C111V019.htm> [accessed November 2, 2007]

<sup>11</sup> Segal, Gerald. *As China’s Shadow Grows, other Asians are on the Defensive*. July 18, 1995. International Herald Tribune website:  
<http://www.iht.com/articles/1995/07/18/edsegal.php> [accessed February 16, 2008].

<sup>12</sup> Severino, Rodolfo. *Globalization's Challenge to Regional Economic Integration*. May 30, 2002. ASEAN website: <http://www.aseansec.org/2781.htm> [accessed February 16, 2008].

<sup>13</sup> Jagan, Larry. *Burma in for a Rough Ride at Summit*. October 6, 2003. BBC News website: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3167720.stm> [accessed February 16, 2008].



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prodemocracy demonstrations in Burma? It was like hearing about a coup in Shangri-La. What was to be done with a place like that?

Thant Myint-U, *The Rivers of Lost Footsteps – Histories of Burma*<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

After more than forty years, Myanmar has not reverted to civilian rule. In his book, Myint-U noted that military coups and short bouts of military government were not uncommon occurrences in ASEAN's formative years.<sup>2</sup> Many of Myanmar's neighbors, including Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Cambodia, were just as politically volatile as the young nation of Burma, if not more. One of the main reasons why Myanmar turned out so differently from these countries, Myint-U thinks, is the lack of diplomatic engagement.

This thesis has found that sanctions and diplomacy have not worked to significantly improve conditions in Myanmar. However, it has shown that “constructive engagement” meets ASEAN's regional interests. Nevertheless, there is a need for “constructive engagement” to address “International” and “Grassroots” concerns too. It has shown that although ASEAN has limited military and economic means to influence change in Myanmar, member states in the association can offer other approaches, such as sharing their experience in governance and trade. These other methods of engagements could be incentives to convince the SPDC to allow foreign assistance in that country as well.

This final chapter discusses two main issues in ASEAN's interaction with Myanmar. First, it will discuss the internal challenges ASEAN faces as an association and some options the association may take to improve "constructive engagement." These include reasons why ASEAN should not be contented with meeting the "Regional" interests but strive to improve "constructive engagement" to meet "International" and "Grassroots" concerns too. Second, it will discuss three main areas where ASEAN can assist Myanmar. These areas could ensure that the SPDC continues to accept foreign assistance, and that such assistance will have a lasting effect in Myanmar. These areas include assisting the SPDC in national reconciliation and economic invigoration in the near term, and in the long term, building systems of good governance for that country. Before concluding, some lessons learnt and areas for further research will be highlighted.

#### Improving "Constructive Engagement"

Until the new charter is ratified by ASEAN member states, the current charter declares that ASEAN is an intergovernmental alliance that promotes economic and social integration in Southeast Asia. As an economic alliance, ASEAN does not have to shoulder the diplomatic responsibility of Myanmar's internal behavior. In addition, the internal situation in Myanmar is only one of many issues faced by the association, and in the opinion of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong ASEAN should not allow a single issue to dominate other priorities, such as regional integration. However, Myanmar's reform brings many advantages to Southeast Asia. This section discusses the key challenges in "constructive engagement," presents reasons why ASEAN should help Myanmar reform, and suggests some possible ways to do so.

## ASEAN's Challenges

ASEAN is an association does not have any economic or military means to influence Myanmar; this is a major limitation. It does, however, have other capabilities to influence reform. Its good diplomatic standing with major world powers allows the association to mediate differences between Myanmar and western aligned countries which Myanmar recognizes as a major source of foreign investments. In addition, residing within most of the association's member states is a wealth of proven economic development and public administration experience. It is possible for these countries to leverage their experience by sending economic and public administration advisory groups to aid Myanmar's reform and help it reach its economic goals. These options will not only strengthen regional stability, they will eventually address many concerns generated from the "International" and "Grassroots" perspective.

Another challenge is the attitude and policies of the SPDC. Despite ASEAN's commitment to help Myanmar, many of the country's problems will not be eradicated unless the military junta is committed to modernizing its policies and works to address both "International" and "Grassroots" concerns. The association, like others around the world, is limited in influencing the SPDC. In February 2008, along with its announcement to hold national elections in 2010, the SPDC also declared that political candidates with foreign spouses and children, a reference to Daw Aung San, will be barred from participating. They are adamant about maintaining this policy despite the advice of other ASEAN ministers.<sup>3</sup>

Undue pressure from the west over Myanmar is a challenge facing ASEAN. Although Myanmar has many internal deficiencies, it is not the only country in Southeast

Asia that is performing poorly in the economic and social development arena. As shown in Table 8, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam have equally low Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and human development index (HDI) points, they are also run by communist or military-linked governments, there are numerous human rights concerns involving these countries. It is not within the scope of this study to explore why the West, particularly the US, is not pressuring ASEAN to account for the behavior and performance of these countries as well. It would not only be inequitable for ASEAN to solely press for reform from Myanmar, it would be counter to the association's Charter to act on external diplomatic pressure.

One of the hurdles facing the association may be determining the extent of non-interference in Myanmar without being accused of apathy or providing tacit support to the SPDC's policies. Despite concerns raised by many political leaders in Southeast Asia regarding Myanmar, ASEAN has not defined specific objectives and timelines to monitor the progress of reform. This obstacle may be overcome with the ratification of the new ASEAN Charter by incorporating considerations for the protection of human rights and human development.

Although Chapter 4 has shown that "constructive engagement" currently meets almost all the concerns from the "Regional" perspective, the association should not be content with the status quo in Myanmar, in particular the concerns from the "Grassroots" perspective. The next sub-section will present the reasons why ASEAN should continue to influence change in Myanmar despite these challenges.

## ASEAN and a Successful Myanmar

Despite its limited influence, ASEAN continues to support Myanmar's membership in the association. There are many reasons for this, but geopolitical considerations are paramount, such as the need to balance China's influence. Even so, ASEAN's ability to influence Myanmar may have reached a culminating point. In a recent interview, the Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy Professor Kishore Mahbubani said that "Myanmar or Burma is one of ASEAN's big failures. Clearly, we tried and we failed and we are happy now to hand over the problem back to you (the US) whenever you are ready."<sup>4</sup> This study, however, proposes that "constructive engagement" should continue because it is still able to address concerns from a "Regional" perspective. This study further proposes that "constructive engagement" needs to be more effective in order to meet other concerns from the "International" and "Grassroots" perspective. This section will highlight the reasons why ASEAN should improve the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" from three angles - as an obligation, from a point of consequence, and from the point of ethics.

The ASEAN Vision 2020 and the proposal for the new ASEAN Charter highlight the need for protection of and respect for human rights in the region. This is a leap forward from the Bangkok Declaration of 1967 which only addressed the acceleration of social progress and cultural development as one of the aims and purposes of the association. With the creation of the Ha Noi plan to implement the ASEAN Vision 2020, the association has an obligation to the people of ASEAN member states to help improve their welfare and way of life. Furthermore, Article 1 of the new Charter calls for the enhancement of the "well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing

them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice” in addition to references outlining other concerns expressed from the “Grassroots” perspective.

Secondly, ASEAN needs to improve the effectiveness of “constructive engagement” to avoid less than desirable consequences in the region. As mentioned previously, the decision to retain Myanmar in the association is anchored by many geopolitical considerations, in particular the need to balance China and possibly Russia’s influence in Myanmar. In addition, “constructive engagement” is necessary to prevent Myanmar’s security and societal problems from impacting the rest of Southeast Asia. These problems include the occasional border clashes between Thailand and Myanmar, as well as the trafficking of narcotics and persons from that country. Furthermore, since sanctions have not worked to change the SPDC’s policies and attitudes, a pro-active diplomatic approach such as “constructive engagement” is necessary. Myanmar’s membership in ASEAN not only allows regional member states to dialogue with and advise that country, meetings like the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) allow international observers and partners from other countries, such as the US and China, to have informal or closed-door discussions with it too. Other positive consequences of enhancing “constructive engagement” include better international standing for ASEAN and laying the foundation for greater economic cooperation within the region in the future. Due to its unique diplomatic approach, successful “constructive engagement” and the “ASEAN Way” may potentially offer the international community another style of diplomacy founded on the principles of consensus and cooperation.

Lastly, from an ethical perspective, the more democratically and economically successful countries which form the majority of ASEAN need to assist their weaker neighbors, including Myanmar. Encapsulated within the ASEAN Vision 2020 and the new ASEAN Charter is a picture of prosperity and peace in the region. Indeed, the linchpin of ASEAN diplomacy of *Musyawarah* is rooted in the Javanese culture which emphasizes social harmony and equality to make decisions. Therefore, the ASEAN identity goes deeper than the practice of *Musyawarah* but rather is a shared identity wherein there is as much concern for thy neighbors' welfare, as there is for your own. It is not surprising to observe that the ASEAN Vision 2020 articulates a vision for "a socially cohesive and caring ASEAN" and to create a region "where all people enjoy equitable access to opportunities for total human development." Given the low standard of living in Myanmar, it is only ethical for ASEAN to offer economic and social assistance for the betterment of their fellow Southeast Asians.

Despite the present deadlock in negotiations between Myanmar and ASEAN regarding the country's internal situation, there are many reasons for the association to pursue "constructive engagement." On the other hand, how can the association help if the SPDC seems neither to desire external assistance nor to improve the situation in its own country? The next sub-section offers a possible strategy to enhance "constructive engagement."

### Improving "Constructive Engagement"

"Constructive Engagement" toward Myanmar has been practiced for more than 10 years since the country joined the association. This study has shown that this approach has met the concerns from a "Regional" perspective but it does not address many

concerns from the “International” and “Grassroots” perspective. Given its limited means, it is proposed that the association focus on maintaining “Regional” concerns as it seeks to address “Grassroots” problems. Throughout the course of this study, numerous suggestions have been offered, particularly in Table 5, on how to improve the various aspects of “constructive engagement.” This section will highlight proposals not mentioned previously. The principal consideration is that they should not contradict the ASEAN Charter.

From a “Regional” perspective, there is a need for ASEAN member states to ratify the association’s new Charter in order to hold all member states accountable for the protection of human rights. Although critics have highlighted that the new Charter lacks enforcement measures, compared to the original ASEAN Charter, it is a significant improvement in that regard. As the association continues to endorse Myanmar’s membership, it should also actively set an example to that country by demonstrating the benefits of ASEAN assistance in other developing member states, such as Laos and Cambodia. The end state and overall measure of effectiveness should be the progress of Myanmar with regard to the Ha Noi Plan of Action.

There are a variety of opportunities for ASEAN to address “Grassroots” problems in Myanmar. In addition to offering preventive medicine and educational assistance to that country, companies in ASEAN states should look toward selective investments in Myanmar that would directly benefit the local population. Investment in the tourism, arts, services, and manufacturing sectors can improve employment rates in the country. Countries in ASEAN with successful public and economic policies can also train incumbent and aspiring Myanmar leaders for better governance of their nation. Taking



an existentialist approach, although ASEAN should be ready to supply the tools to improve that country's standard of living, the end state and measure of effectiveness of this plan should be determined by the people of Myanmar.

With its limited abilities, geopolitical constraints, and the constraints set by its Charter, ASEAN should continue to be cautious in ensuring its relation with Myanmar does not become a proxy for other powers to influence change in that country . In addition it should avoid addressing "International" concerns that run contrary to "Regional" and "Grassroots" interests such as the expulsion of that country from the association despite the many years of cultivating diplomatic relations, or depart from the principles set in the association's Charter. To address the concerns of critics regarding "constructive engagement," ASEAN should engage in more pro-active Strategic Communications by announcing, for instance, a plan of action to assist Myanmar as well as other developing ASEAN states, rather than offering cautious or less than positive replies to press queries concerning the situation in Myanmar.

A crucial issue that should to be considered is whether there is the need for disincentives in "constructive engagement." Almost all the recommendations in this study have been optimistic and do not appear to pressure reform in Myanmar. However, it has been shown that proactive forms of diplomatic and economic pressure by other powers have not facilitated significant progress in that country too. Due to ASEAN's limitations, this study suggests that it is more prudent to build up the attractiveness of diplomatic incentives to influence change rather than to adopt disincentives. In other words, ASEAN's strategy should be to continue "pulling" Myanmar along democratic and social reform, as opposed to "pushing" or "driving" it along. Only when the

“ASEAN Way” and membership in the association evolves to become more advantageous to the interests of member nations, the disincentives could become a powerful tool of negotiations.

### Challenges and Possibilities of Reform in Myanmar

As discussed, there are many reasons for ASEAN to address “International” and “Grassroots” concerns in Myanmar. The greatest challenge in doing so is to convince the SPDC to allow foreign assistance in its country. In addition, addressing “International” and “Grassroots” concerns require more than just providing humanitarian aid. As such, this section will discuss three areas where ASEAN can provide assistance to the SPDC and the Burmese. These areas are national reconciliation, economic invigoration and leadership development.

#### National Reconciliation

National unity within Myanmar is a significant issue and is one of the SPDC’s major concerns. The ability for ASEAN to assist in this area could be a big incentive for them to accept additional foreign assistance from the association. The main reason why this could be an incentive is that regime survival is a top priority for the junta. Without the *Tatmadaw*, it is uncertain whether the periphery regions of Myanmar, particularly the heavily armed narcotics producing states, will secede from the Union and remain even more remote from the globalized world. Reconciliation between Myanmar’s opposition parties and the ruling junta is the most feasible way for the country to slowly revert to civilian rule, while maintaining a credible military capability to prevent the escalation of

civil war. Although the association's Charter limits ASEAN's options, it is possible for ASEAN to facilitate national reconciliation in at least two ways.

First, the new ASEAN human rights body could work with non-governmental organizations and other countries to aid the SPDC in distributing aid to the various ethnic groups in Myanmar. Ensuring equal opportunities to all sectors may reduce ethnic rivalry in the country. Having a central coordinating body could focus differences away from socio-ethnic problems to relatively more manageable socio-economic challenges. For instance, dissenting political issues could be temporarily set aside by helping all parties pursue economic development within the existing national framework. Over the long term, the close interlinkages between economic performance and peace may suppress current political disagreements, such as in the China-Taiwan relations.

Second, while ASEAN countries are trading within Myanmar, they should also invest directly with the hill tribes. This would increase the earnings of the ordinary Burmese, including the ethnic minority groups. Adopting a "peace through trade" concept, increasing affluence over time may reduce the need for all parties to take up arms.

### Economic Invigoration

Economic invigoration could be another incentive for the SPDC to cooperate with ASEAN. With the resources available in that country, invigorating its economy may not be a significant challenge. The challenge, however, is to develop Myanmar's infrastructure and rules of governance to meet the demands of a global economy, creating an educated workforce that can sustain the pace of development. This is another task that can be assisted by ASEAN. However, it is postulated with the junta in power, western

sanctions will continue to be in effect, directly limiting economic development and indirectly affecting the human development in the country. Since sanctions have not directly impacted the SPDC, they may not serve to change the policies of the junta. On the other hand, foreign investments may become a starting point to reverse the declining economic situation and the insular nature of the government in Myanmar. The creation of jobs will not only alleviate the subsistent living conditions in Myanmar and possibly reduce the political frustrations of the people, the offer of more lucrative salaries from new jobs may attract locals who may otherwise join the narcotics industry, sex trade, or some other criminal activity. Furthermore, new jobs could possibly balance recruitment efforts of the *Tatmadaw* and rebel and insurgent groups, thereby contributing to greater stability in the country.

There are many investment possibilities in Myanmar. To alleviate the concern that foreign investments may benefit only those who are in power, this study recommends economic sectors that would allow greater interaction with the local population rather than well-connected tycoons in Myanmar. This would address some of the concerns coming from the “Grassroots” perspective. Since these are externally driven entrepreneurial approaches and they do not adversely impact the junta, these proposals reach fruition in the near term perhaps within the next five to ten years. Once that country’s economy strengthens and its population becomes sufficiently well educated, other industry sectors would naturally be explored. Business sectors that would directly benefit the population in Myanmar and contribute to a more stable society could include the following:

1. Investment in tourism sector. Although there are calls to boycott tourism in Myanmar, increased tourist activity in the country may boost earnings of ordinary citizens, particularly those working in the service industry.
2. The manufacturing sector should be rejuvenated by foreign investments. It would be illogical to withdraw investments that would directly benefit the local population in protest of their government's policies and behavior of which they have no control. Foreign investments could be designed as conditional exceptions to existing sanctions, meaning that companies would invest in Myanmar if the country adheres to labor laws that protect their workers or reinvests the taxes in community development projects.
3. Burmese and ethnic minority arts and crafts could be promoted in overseas markets to support the local artists and craftsmen. ASEAN could further invest in this sector by building arts and crafts markets for facilitate trading while allowing observers to monitor undesirable interference by triads or corrupt officials.
4. Companies in ASEAN could consider employing more Myanmar citizens as expatriate workers, thereby allowing more opportunities for the local population to earn better salaries to support their families.
5. The recent crisis in world food prices offers an excellent opportunity for the international community to support the agricultural sector of Myanmar. In addition, the development of road networks into the highlands of Myanmar could provide the incentive for hilltribes to engage in agriculture, horticulture and other similar industries rather than narcotics production or engage in armed insurgency against the central government.

## Leadership Development in Myanmar

Lasting and sustainable progress in Myanmar cannot be accomplished solely by ASEAN's assistance. There will be a requirement, in the long term, to develop capable leadership in Myanmar to support the various development initiatives that ASEAN could offer to that country. As such, one of the crucial areas to develop is responsible and unoppressive political leadership. With regards to Myanmar, a key area that needs to be addressed is the release of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest.

Since her internment, many supporters of Daw Aung San, internationally and within Myanmar, have lobbied for her release. They regard her as a strong driving force for change in her country and after the 1990 elections many even regard her as the country's President-elect. The key to peacefully securing her release lies with persuading the ruling junta. When that happens, there is a question of what next? In the past, the fervor of political opposition to the SPDC and the *Tatmadaw* resulted in violent confrontations between civilians and the military followed by a political lock-down of the country that lasted almost a decade. Such crackdowns affect not only the process of democratic reform but also the livelihood of the population. As such, calls for Daw Aung San's release by foreign governments should be accompanied by warnings of restraint to all parties concerned, not just to the *Tatmadaw*. Unfortunately, this demand cannot be accomplished by ASEAN alone, nor be pushed too far by other governments and international organizations. There are many reasons for this, but fundamentally there is no legal basis for foreign governments to directly intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Although Daw Aung San has made tremendous personal sacrifice for her country and remains a key figure in Myanmar's politics, one possible way forward is

to focus both on her release as well as the development and fielding of equally capable national leaders.

Efforts to secure Daw Aung San's release should be done concurrently with the following activities. First, the grooming of other political leaders in Myanmar capable of leading Myanmar toward reform and progress. Countries in ASEAN can assist by training and advising incumbent and aspiring leaders in Myanmar on effective governance. This will ensure the availability and continuity of effective leadership in Myanmar without being hampered by the issue of Daw Aung San's imprisonment. When transition to civilian rule occurs, there will be a pool of readily equipped civilian leaders. ASEAN could consider providing more education scholarships to students from Myanmar which would not contravene the association's policy of non-intervention. To protect these potential civilian leaders from possible harassment by staunch junta members, it may be necessary to train them as interns in ASEAN member countries, or employ them under the auspices of an ASEAN diplomatic support mission in Myanmar.

Secondly, the people of Myanmar should strengthen support for other political parties or create new parties in the national elections schedule for 2010, especially when existing governmental restrictions are relaxed. By divesting alternative political representation away from the NLD or Daw Aung San through the grooming of other leaders, it may reduce Daw Aung San's centrality in Myanmar's political scene. Consequently, a reduction of Daw Aung San's political profile may ease the SPDC's consternation and aid in negotiating her eventual release. Currently, with Daw Aung San under house arrest, continued reliance on her to lead the country will only cement the SPDC's grip on opposition power in Myanmar.

These two proposals are very optimistic in relation to Myanmar's current internal situation. However, they are feasible suggestions which could be taken up in the future and especially when the junta is convinced regarding the benefits of ASEAN assistance in national reconciliation and economic invigoration. Since, the creation of leadership alternatives in that country will require a long lead time, it underscores the need for the Burmese and ASEAN to consider and plan for such a move as early as possible.

### Assessment

The study of ASEAN's relationship with Myanmar has been challenging and thought-provoking. Although ASEAN's Charter constrains the association to peaceful diplomatic means, this study shows the possibility of developing strategies to influence the SPDC. A unique aspect of this study was to work within the seemingly restrictive boundaries set by the association's Charter to propose a strategy to help Myanmar. This enhanced the author's appreciation of the challenges faced by the association as well as the opportunities that are available. Although the views of many advocates and critics of "constructive engagement" were explored in Chapter 2, there were few commentaries that address ASEAN's approach from an equally balanced perspective. The lack of a balanced perspective was helpful in a number of ways. It compelled the research to take a fresh definition of the situation in Myanmar, particularly from the Southeast Asian perspective, as opposed to the predominantly western viewpoint of many analysts. It also allowed the study to "test" the practicality of the ASEAN's charter on one of the world's most challenging diplomatic problems.

Another different approach taken by this research was evaluating the effectiveness of "constructive engagement" according to three different perspectives. This



classification allowed the study to separate several concerns toward Myanmar and recommended that ASEAN should address, in order of priority, “Regional,” “Grassroots,” and finally “International” concerns. A significant aspect of “constructive engagement” is that it does not fit neatly into a Clausewitzian strategic model. This could be a major factor contributing to criticism regarding ASEAN’s approach toward Myanmar. The trouble with “constructive engagement” is the absence of measurements of effectiveness, objectives to be achieved, and timelines, amongst other characteristics and success criteria. Unless one understands the cultural significance of *Musyawah*, “constructive engagement” may appear to be a vain hope and unable to influence reform in Myanmar. It is therefore necessary to highlight some observations of ASEAN foreign policy formulation which are different from Western foreign policy methods.

#### Southeast Asian Foreign Policy

First, it goes without saying that there are different styles of diplomacy and the “ASEAN Way” is one of them. Since the basis for the “ASEAN Way” is decision by consensus and non-interference, it would be a contradictory practice to articulate definitive demands on a member state unless everyone in the association, including the member in focus, agrees. This may be one of the primary reasons why “constructive engagement” lacks the strategic details such as ways and means commonly found in Western foreign policy documents. Nevertheless, it is possible that a published strategy to assist Myanmar and other developing countries in the region may be developed by the association in order to facilitate Strategic Communication efforts.

Second, although a published strategy to influence Myanmar does not exist, it does not mean that the association is not making the effort. As mentioned earlier, in the

ASEAN setting, there are numerous opportunities for ASEAN member states and its international partners to dialogue with Myanmar. Diplomacy with an insular regime is already difficult enough; isolation or suspension will only make it more difficult by severing the diplomatic relationships built over the years.

Third, political freedom is important in any society, but in a developing country livelihood is equally important. With the exception of Singapore and Brunei, most other Southeast Asian economies are still recovering from the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and for some, the aftereffects of the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. As victims of both crises, it must be remembered that the economic needs of the population in Myanmar are also key. This leads us to the fourth point on ethics.

The point of inflexion where the application of economic isolation to cajole political reform in a country begins to affect the livelihood of the civilian population is very difficult to measure. Such is the case in Myanmar where thousands have lost their jobs and continue to suffer the effects of restricted foreign investments. Since this point of inflexion is hard to determine, it is the researcher's opinion that the high stakes gamble of waging economic aid to coerce political demands should be played very carefully.

Fifth, the timeline for reform in Myanmar is subjective. Unless there is an immediate threat to regional or internal stability, the timeline for change in Myanmar should be in accordance with the abilities of that country's leaders and citizens. Given that the current generation of leaders in that country may be too entrenched in their mindset, another possibility to influence change is to educate the younger generation. This study also recognizes the counterargument to help the oppressed and address the wrongs of human rights violations. This brings us to capabilities.

The sixth lesson in this study is the need to work within our means. As discussed, although the association's Charter is maturing, there exist many diplomatic constraints in its Charter to preserve geopolitical dynamics in Southeast Asia. ASEAN should not give up "constructive engagement" but work with its limited means to assist Myanmar. Furthermore, other than working on specific measures to influence and assist change in that country, there is a need for the association to increase the strategic benefits of membership in ASEAN. This will not only offer greater incentive for member states to reform, it will also work to make future disincentives more powerful.

Taking an existential approach, the seventh lesson learnt is that despite the incentives and assistance offered by external governments, only the citizens of Myanmar can chart the future of their country. A major problem in the case of Myanmar is the population's belief in *Karma*. Other than education, there is little that can be done to dispel deep superstitious beliefs. ASEAN should, however, continue to offer assistance to Myanmar in providing structures of governance and public administration, rather than simply offering humanitarian or economic aid.

Eight, other than ASEAN, international actors such as China, Russia, and India all have a stake in Myanmar's progress. Although this thesis has focused largely on ASEAN's relations with Myanmar, the actions by these world giants will significantly affect the plans of the association. In particular, China or India may eventually move to discourage the continuing build-up of the *Tatmadaw*. This could give ASEAN diplomacy a greater leverage.

Finally, a major challenge for ASEAN and the international community, to pressure reform in Myanmar is the absence of a standard. Although there are indicators

such as the Human Development Index and other political statistics which can help to set goals for Myanmar, it would be unreasonable for other countries to impose their expectations and template of governance onto that country. Furthermore, not only is Myanmar one of many countries in the world that is commonly viewed as dysfunctional, even developed nations have their share of domestic problems too. An objective measure of effectiveness for any foreign policy toward Myanmar could be the “Grassroots” perspective. This is because despite the unique constraints, limitations, and resource different world powers have in crafting their foreign policy toward Myanmar, the ultimate measure should be whether they have tangible benefits for the Burmese, and otherwise they continue to become empty political talk.

#### Diplomacy with Dictators

One of the main challenges in this study was to propose incentives to a military regime to relinquish power. Unfortunately, history has shown that pure diplomacy with dictators is virtually impossible without the threat or application of military action. Although “constructive engagement” does not aim to convince the SPDC to retire, it has successfully persuaded the junta to ratify the new association Charter. Even so, there is no guarantee that ASEAN will continue to experience success as the geopolitical landscape in Southeast Asia morphs with the rise of India and China, and the changeover of the Russian and US presidential administrations.

Diplomacy with dictators requires patience and deft negotiation skills. Furthermore, it is often remarked that insular regimes like the SPDC would like nothing more than to be left alone. This is a significant aspect of diplomacy with Myanmar that must be understood. Because the use of force is not possible in the ASEAN context, and

experience has shown that the application of sanctions have also failed to influence the junta, there seems to be little alternative but to continue diplomacy. For the association to break off diplomatic relations with Myanmar would be to give up on the Burmese.

It is not within the scope of this study to develop methods of negotiating with dictatorships. However, there are some lessons from modern history which ASEAN may adopt to prevent cooling relations or break the deadlock in negotiations. These include diplomatic moves, such as the recent visit by the New York Philharmonic Orchestra to Pyongyang or the exchange of table-tennis players by the US and China in 1971, both events that demonstrated the effectiveness of continued diplomatic interaction as opposed to isolation. In essence, there is a need to develop multiple avenues of interaction to keep the relationship alive, and in the case of Myanmar, this study argues that the primary argument is to allow a foothold for international assistance to continue. Furthermore, this study has also shown that to economically and diplomatically isolate Myanmar in protest of its methods of governance will likely be futile since it could hurt the civilian population further and the regime has other eager suitors waiting.

Probably a major consternation in dealing with dictators is whether one is held a virtual hostage in addition to those that are already being oppressed in country. There is validity to it, especially if there is no reciprocity of effort to improve the lives of those who are the subject of misrule. It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the use of military power, even though it is recognized that when dialogue has reached its culmination, “constructive engagement” will probably cease and make way for other methods of persuasion by the rest of the international community. Although the situation appears similar, that is not yet the case in Myanmar. The current levels of foreign

investments by ASEAN member states are insufficiently high to cultivate the regime's dependence, the effects of sanctions have increased public dissent against the government, and it is possible that there are other offers of trade by non-western aligned countries which come with no political strings attached. If it is decided to continue attempting peaceful negotiations, a possible approach may be to increase foreign investments for the next 10 to 15 years, in conjunction with the current specific sanctions by the US, before deciding if dialogue and investments have been worth their while.

A feasible but slightly unpalatable proposal in dealing with Myanmar's dictators could be to change their outlook and behaviour in an evolutionary manner. Although it will be extremely desirable for the junta to step down or completely reform within the next few years, it is not likely to happen. However, with the combined application of increasing diplomacy and economic incentives, coupled with decreasing disincentives by other world powers, it may be feasible to convince the junta to adopt more benevolent methods of governance. ASEAN and other world powers should strive to gradually morph the junta into a more benevolent dictatorship, and subsequently more inclusive styles of governance. It is possible for such leadership changes to occur as demonstrated in recent history by the fall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the changing attitudes of Muammar Gaddafi. Nevertheless, changing dictatorship by any foreign policy remains a lesser priority than meeting Myanmar's "Grassroots" concerns.

#### Feasibility of Recommendations

This study has offered many suggestions for ASEAN and the rest of the international community to consider in their policies toward Myanmar. The author recognizes that many of these recommendations may be optimistic considering the

present nature of the ruling junta. However, they offer some food for thought. While some suggestions such as foreign investments could be implemented in the near term, others may only become a reality much later when the political conditions in the country, and even in the region, are suitable. Nevertheless, there is no harm in being optimistic about the future, and it would do Myanmar well if domestic and external stakeholders commence setting the conditions for that country's success today.

It is important to clarify that although this research recommends “constructive engagement,” it does not condone the brutal and repressive policies of Myanmar's ruling junta. This study has attempted to offer optimistic suggestions for ASEAN to break the present deadlock in negotiations with Myanmar. Regional security considerations and the betterment of the Burmese must be the objectives of “constructive engagement.” As such, ASEAN should work around its inherent organizational limitations and geopolitical constraints to facilitate a brighter future for Myanmar. And the only feasible approach that ASEAN can take is an intensive and sustained campaign to further incentivise “constructive engagement,” such that even more support, aid, and assistance can flow into that country to benefit the people of Myanmar in the near term. In the long term, “constructive engagement” should develop systems and capabilities in Myanmar that will support lasting and sustained progress in that country.

#### Further Study

Although this thesis has answered all its primary and secondary research questions, there are many topics concerning Myanmar which can be further researched. A significant area of research needs to be the economic development plans for Myanmar. Despite the many critiques of the SPDC's policies, there has yet to be a proposal to

improve that country's economic performance. An added challenge would be to identify sectors of the economy where investments would benefit as many of Myanmar's population as possible.

Another area of research could be the development of a Bayesian decision making models to determine the point of inflexion between economic motivation and political outcome in Myanmar. Findings could give the association an indication of the practicality of "constructive engagement."

Other studies on Myanmar which might will be beneficial from a "Regional" perspective include estimation on the impact to the region if the domestic issues in that country are not successfully contained by the SPDC, including the spread of Avian Influenza, HIV/AIDS, refugee flows and other concerns. The impact of the *Tatmadaw's* growth on the geopolitical balance between India, China, and Southeast Asia could be another area of further research.

### Summary and Conclusion

This study has briefly introduced the history of Myanmar, the current situation in that country, and its relationship with ASEAN. The research subsequently redefined the situation in that country by highlighting the possible root causes of Myanmar's problems, the concerns of international actors as well as internal stakeholders, and how well "constructive engagement" has performed from the "International," "Regional," and "Grassroots" perspective. Finally, this study has suggested that "constructive engagement" is effective and should be continued with some recommendations for enhancements.



Without a doubt, the situation in Myanmar presents many challenges, but most significantly it has caused daily suffering for many of its 54 million citizens. Although Myanmar is not the only country in ASEAN that is struggling to escape the poverty trap, it is a member of an association consisting of many democratically and economically successful nations. There is therefore potential for Myanmar and ASEAN to tap on such expertise to improve the situation in that country. So far, “constructive engagement” has performed well in keeping Myanmar engaged and accountable to the rest of the world. It has also contributed to balancing the regional security dynamics in Southeast Asia. Once its shortcomings are addressed, it will have the potential to revolutionize diplomacy if it is successful over time. By Myanmar and ASEAN working together to solve that country’s problems, it is possible to export the “ASEAN Way” to other parts of the world. Hopefully, the introduction of a new ASEAN Charter will be a significant milestone for the association and propel ASEAN-Myanmar relations further.

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<sup>1</sup> Myint-U, Thant. 2006. *The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Pg. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Pp. 347-348.

<sup>3</sup> Ramesh, S. *Myanmar citizens with foreign husbands barred from domestic politics*. February 20, 2008. Channel News Asia website: <http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/singaporelocalnews/view/329891/1/.html> [accessed February 20, 2008].

<sup>4</sup> Council of Foreign Relations. *Interview with Kishore Mahbubahi – Can America Handle the Rise of Asia?* February 28, 2008. Council of Foreign Relations website: [http://www.cfr.org/publication/15650/can\\_america\\_handle\\_the\\_rise\\_of\\_asia\\_video.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fby\\_type%2Fvideo](http://www.cfr.org/publication/15650/can_america_handle_the_rise_of_asia_video.html?breadcrumb=%2Fpublication%2Fby_type%2Fvideo) [accessed March 7, 2008].

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