

**Staying Away from Democratization:
Ethnic Cleavages and the Long Life of the Military Regime in Myanmar**

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Submitted to
The Department of Political Science
Central European University

In partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Political Science

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Budapest, Hungary
(2020)

Abstract

Myanmar's military regime distinguished itself from the other military regimes by surviving more than two decades as a pure military regime without being replaced by another authoritarian one or being democratized. Despite the different explanations, existing literature agreed on the fact that military regimes are fragile, and they are relatively easier to be democratized. Thus, the longevity of Myanmar's military regime is an exceptional case and remains unexplained theoretically. Why could it survive for more than two decades? In this research proposal, I will show that the longevity of Myanmar's military regime needs not a new theory and the existing theory that explain the longevity of one-party authoritarian regimes can also apply to Myanmar's military regime. I argue that a military regime in Myanmar could last in office because it can adopt the functions that the one-party regimes carry out.

Acknowledgment

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Carsten Q. Schneider for his guidance and support. I am grateful to Daw Mi Mi Gyi and Daw Aye Aye Myat for their help with finding the data and archival research. I am thankful to my two best friends, Eaint Myat Chit and May Thiri Khin for their help with content analysis of the political ideology of the military regime. I would like to thank my best friend, Polina Vershinina, for her support and encouragement throughout the whole MA programme at CEU. I want to express my gratitude to all those who helped me for my thesis but whom I cannot name here for their safety and privacy.

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List of Abbreviations

ABSDF	All Burma Students' Democratic Front
BSPP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CPB	Communist Party of Burma
EAO	Ethnic Armed Organisation
KNU	Karen National Union
MEC	Myanmar Economic Corporation
MNDA	Myanmar National Democratic Party
NCA	Nation-wide Ceasefire Agreement
NDSC	National Defence and Security Council
NLD	National League of Democracy
NMSP	New Mon State Party
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SNLD	Shan National League of Democracy
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
SSA	Shan State Army
UMEH	Union of Myanmar Economic
UWSA	United Wa State Army

Introduction

Military regimes are not a new phenomenon to Southeast Asia or the third world. In the region, besides Myanmar¹, the military of Thailand and Indonesia involved and are still involving in the politics in very significant ways. Thailand witnessed at least 19 military coups d'état² since 1932. In Indonesia, President Suharto not only came from the military but the military itself took the seats in parliaments as well. Given that history, is Myanmar exceptional? There are many differences how military play a political role in these three countries. The major difference is how they occupied power. Thai military never took power for more than five years. Suharto – who was the commander of the army at the time he became president – resigned from the army after five years in his presidency and transformed himself into a civilian. In contrast, Myanmar military ruled the country as a pure military regime for twenty-one years.

In Latin America, three military regimes are similar to that of Myanmar and lasted long – Paraguay, Chile and Panama.³ Military regimes in all three countries could remain in office for several decades. Like Myanmar, those military regimes are collegial military regimes where there are constraints and negotiations among the elites. However, there are fundamental differences between these three military regimes and Myanmar's military regime. The most significant difference is the time period they emerged. Myanmar's military regime emerged in 1989 where the other three regimes were about to fall. Moreover, Myanmar's military regime could hold to the power despite the pro-democracy mass demonstration that preceded the 1988 coup d'état. When the military in Myanmar came to the power, most of the military regimes around the world were disappearing. Diamond stated that “[During the third wave of

¹ In this thesis, I will use only post-1989 spellings except for the name of the association. The only purpose to use post-1989 spellings is to keep the terms consistent and it does not entail any political intention

² 12 of them were successful.

³ The military regime lasted 35 years in Paraguay (1954-1989), 21 years in Panama (1968 – 1989) and 19 years in Chile (1973-1989)

democratization,] military regimes have virtually disappeared as anything more than a transition type of rule”(Diamond 2002, 27). Myanmar’s military regime was completely an exception to the statement. They came to the power in 1988 and two decades of their tenure was not just a transition.

In this thesis, I will ask the question how military regime in Myanmar exceptionally survived for more than two decades. In first chapter, I will introduce the fundamental concepts related to regime types and the nature of military regimes. The second chapter will explain the historical background of the military regime in Myanmar. The theory and the research design will be presented in the third chapter. In the fourth chapter, I will explain the power-sharing arrangement among the elites of the military regime and the fifth chapter will discuss how the state’s resources is distributed to the loyalist. Finally, in the sixth chapter, I will identify the political ideology of military regime.

Chapter 1. Main concepts

1.1 The conceptualisation of the military regime

Alvarez et. al (1996) and Przeworski et al. (2000) break down the regimes into two camps; democracy and dictatorship. The determinant of the dichotomous classification is the elections. On the one hand, governments that are formed from the result of the contested elections are regarded as democracy. On the other hand, the dictatorships acquire the power or the offices by the means that are not contested an election. Gandhi (2008) and Cheibub et al. (2010) adopted this dichotomous classification: the former to further break down the authoritarian regimes and the latter to measure and breakdown both types of regime further. While there is no shortage of criticism for the classification based on elections, the more controversies and diverse opinions lie at classification and operationalisation of subtypes of those two regimes(Diamond 2002; Merkel 2004; Levitsky and Way 2002).⁴ For Myanmar's military regime is the main focus in my research, I will only deal with the operationalisation of military rule – and to some extent, authoritarian regime.

Why do we need the subsets at all while they can all be called authoritarian regimes? While they share the common features – non-elected means of assuring power, the way the governments are composed and the way decision making takes place can be varied fundamentally from one subtype to another. That typology will also become important for my research question because my research will be comparing the military regime in Myanmar to the one-party regimes.

⁴ According to Diamond, the third wave of democratization brought the “ambiguous regimes”(Diamond 2002, 21). He argued that there are now regimes who will not fully fulfilled even the minimalist definition of democracy but they also have democratic features to be called authoritarian regimes. Merkel (2004) also pointed they are losing one or more embedded features of democracy and presented the typology of what she called defective democracies.

The patterns that emerged from the transitions of Latin American countries from military regimes and the transitions that followed the collapse of Soviet Union proved that the similar authoritarian types can result in similar experiences in transitions (Geddes 1999). It is not uncommon that one authoritarian regime is replaced by another one of similar type or different authoritarian regime. In some cases, some regimes are prone to democratization than the others. The potential threat to the regime –whether it will emerge within the regime itself or it will come from outside – can be identified with the regime types as well. In other words, the regime types let us predict the possible end of the authoritarian regime. (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010; Gandhi 2008)

Gandhi (2008) breakdown the authoritarian regimes into three; monarchs, military dictatorships and civilian dictatorships. The institutional structure, to be more specific, the effective head of government made the distinction between among three subtypes of dictatorship. That operationalization is based on three rules.

First, a government is considered a monarchy if the succession of head of government is based on the bloodline or within the family member. Second, a military dictatorship is when the head of government is a member of the institutionalized military. Even if a government is led by the retired member of the government, it will still be considered military dictatorship assuming that the military status will still be with that person beyond retirement or resignation. Third, if a government belongs to neither of the categories it will belong to the civilian dictatorship. (Gandhi 2008)

The conceptualisation of Gandhi (2008) is problematic in three ways. First, even though she claimed that her conceptualisation is based on the institutional structure, the only thing that matter in the classification is the head of government. In doing so, the composition of the government was ignored in the conceptualisation. It ignores the elite composition, where the loyalty of the government lies. It becomes also difficult to say where the potential threat can

emerge for these regimes. Second, failing to break down the civilian dictatorship is also a weakness for we are witnessing today more diverse types of civilian dictatorship with different natures(Geddes 1999).

Third, the way military dictatorship was conceptualised is problematic. In this conceptualisation, the military dictatorship needs not to rule through military institutions because a government is qualified as military dictatorship if its head is former or current military official. This operationalisation is simple and easy to detect military rule. However, it says very little about the regime. As I have pointed above, it did not say how the government will function at all. It does not predict where the threat for the regime is either. Forgetting the elite formation comes with a problem because it informs where the bargaining will take place and who the government tends to represent. For it does not account the elite composition, the fact whether the head of government relies only on its charisma, civilian circle or armed force will be dismissed from the analysis.

Another problem of conceptualising the military dictatorship only by the head of government is the ambiguity. It is not clear how it will be classified if a retired military official is elected. One can argue that in that case, that government will be democratic for the first step of conceptualisation is whether the head of government is elected or not. However, the conceptualisation here is contradictory because it was assumed that military officials always have the military status even beyond retirement or resignation. The practical cases do not show single direction for whether the head of government being served in the military affect the quality of democracy or not. While it will be foolish to claim George Washington, the first president of United States, a military ruler because of his service in military before his presidency, Thailand had witnessed several occasions where generals resigned right before the elections, run, won the election, took office and maintained the strong military status in the office.

Geddes (1999) gave a way to solve this problem. She divided the authoritarian regimes into three different types: personalist, military and single-party. She pointed out a leader who is originally from either military and a party can become so powerful that all of the decision making and loyalty will concentrate only in his or her hand without any constraints imposed by the original institution. She labelled that sort of dictatorship as personalist authoritarian government. A government become a single party when policymaking and political offices are under control of a party regardless of the existence of the other parties or elections. A military regime is a government in which a group of officers are the main decision-makers. In this conceptualisation, the possibility that military regime can be led by solely by a military official rather than a body of officers is ignored.

However, in her later articles, she included that possibility in the conceptualisation of military rule. Geddes et al. (2014) conceptualised every government led by a current member of the military as a military rule, unlike Gandhi conceptualisation where a regime qualified as a military regime if it's led by former military personnel. The military rule is further categorized into two based on who gets a say in decision and policymaking. First, the term "military regime" is used for the government in which military officials must make decisions collectively. Even though there can be a military officer which is representing the whole military and government in public and international stage, he cannot make the decisions alone and faces constraint imposed by the elites, i.e. the other members of the military. Political influence is not monopolised but rather shared among the military officers. Second, the term "military strongman rule" is used for the government when the decision making can be done autonomously by a military leader. In this case, that person needs not to consult with other members or needs not to face the threat or constraints from the other members for power has been concentrated enough to disregard those concern.

In this thesis, I will use this conceptualisation of Geddes, Frantz, and Wright (2014). Thus, a regime will be defined as a military regime only if it meets two conditions. First, the government must be led by a current member of military. Second, the decision making must be subject to the military institutions, simply put, the decision must be made collectively with other senior officials from military. Based on this conceptualisation, only the military regime between 1988 and 2011 will be qualified as a military regime and analysis will be done on that regime alone. (see chapter three for more precise explanation)

1.2 The fragility of military rule

In military rules, the leader or the leaders come from the military where the weapons are concentrated and special training for security are a daily routine. Thus, it is common sense to think that armed forces will be able to eliminate the rivals more easily and grasped to the power stronger than other types of authoritarian regimes. However, in reality, it is counter-intuitive and military rules are fragile than others. Since the 1960s, the world has witnessed that military rule is taken over another military rule, another authoritarian regime or face democratization more frequently than any other authoritarian regimes. All the data from Geddes et al. (2014), Geddes (1999), Debs (2016), Magaloni (2008) and Kim and Kroeger (2018) indicated that military rules are least durable and most fragile.

The following table showed the life span of the various different regimes. As the data is from Geddes (1999), both conceptualisation and operationalisation of authoritarian regimes is the same as in this thesis. The data include the authoritarian regimes all over the world between 1946 and 1988. The first column gives the average length of the regimes that were already ousted or left the office by 1988. The second column gives the average length of the regimes that are still in the office when the data is collected which is 1988. In both cases, the military regime is the type of regime with the shortest life span. The average length of rule of a military

is merely nine years in the first case and slightly over seven years in second while personal regimes enjoy a decade of life span and single party regime more than decades of life span.

Table 1. Durability of different types of authoritarian regimes

	Average Length of Rule (years)	Average Age of Surviving Regimes	Percent of Regimes Surviving in 1998
Military	8.8 (31) ^a	7.3 (4)	11.4
Personal	10.3 (3)	12.3 (3)	19.8
Single-Party (stringent transition criteria)	22.7 (17)	35.1 (17)	50
Single-Party (less stringent criteria)	25.7 (22)	33.5 (11)	33.3
^a Number of regimes Source:(Geddes 1999)			

Moreover, starting from 1975, the failure of the military regime is increasing dramatically. By using five-year time period, Geddes (1999) compared the failure rate of three authoritarian regimes. The data over up to 1994. At any given point, military regime proves to be the most fragile regime type. The failure rate of military regimes peaked between 1980 and 1990 with half of them resulting in regime breakdown. However, it is in 1988 when military regime took over the office in Myanmar. By the end of 1994, there are only 7 military regimes left worldwide.

Table 2. Failure rate of authoritarian regime

	Single-Party	Personalist	Military
1945 - 1949	0.14 ^a (7) ^b	0.11 (9)	0.25 (4)
1950 - 1954	0.0 (8)	0.0 (12)	0.33 (3)
1955 - 1959	0.0 (11)	0.27 (15)	0.40 (5)
1960 - 1964	0.05(21)	0.19 (16)	0.13 (8)
1965 - 1969	0.04 (24)	0.21 (24)	0.31 (13)
1970 - 1974	0.13 (24)	0.13 (24)	0.20 (15)
1975 - 1979	0.12 (26)	0.35 (26)	0.40 (15)
1980 - 1984	0.04 (27)	0.14 (22)	0.55 (11)
1985 - 1989	0.04 (23)	0.18 (22)	0.50 (8)
1990 - 1994	0.26 (23)	0.42 (19)	0.43 (7)

Average mortality rate per 5-year period	0.08	0.20	0.35
^a Proportion of the total number of each kind of regime in existence, or that came into existence during the time period, that ended during each five-year time span. ^b Number of regimes in each category during each five year period. Source:(Geddes 1999)			

While most scholars argued, and data proved for the fragility, the reasons for the fragility of military rule is much less agreed. Huntington stated that it is relatively more likely for the military regime to accept or even initiate the democratic rule because they never expect to rule the country forever because they already have the permanent institutional role (Huntington 1991). For other regimes, leaving the office usually means the end of the power and authority. It is different in the case of military. Moreover, most military government usually announced that they will be in the office for the transition period which is not a common feature for other regimes.

Another argument for the fragility of the military regime is constructed around the internal nature of military regimes – it is claimed that the military regime is more exposed to the internal fractions which usually led to the end of the regime – and their vulnerability to the economic challenges(Geddes, Frantz, and Wright 2014).

Kim and Kroeger (2018) summarized the explanations for the fragility of the military rules into three: fractions among military officers, lack of party-like structural power and, lastly, lack of ideology.

Geddes (1999) claimed that rigid hierarchical nature and training and institutional structure of obedience are not the main reasons that military rule tend to stay united. History had shown that the rebellions in the military regimes emerged, the reshuffling for the leadership posts appeared because of internal tensions and even internal coups happened under the military rule. Ironically, it is usually the fractions the military rules that made the military rulers stay

united. Geddes (1999) used the game theory to explain why the military rulers are more willing to give up the office and return to the barracks than the personalistic regimes. The explanation is that even if a small fraction is willing for democracy or simply discontent with the regime, it will be better for the whole elite to cooperate and go back to the barracks because that small faction, however, can make the whole rule or the military itself weak. Although the monopolisation of weapon and specialised armed forces cannot be the ultimate guarantee for regime stability, that comparative advantage usually gives enough leverage to make a favourable term for post-retirement. Among the three authoritarian regimes, military rule is the one that is most frequently followed by the non-coerced transition. (Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland 2010; Geddes, Frantz, and Wright 2014; Kim and Kroeger 2018). Magaloni (2008) also showed that the military regimes that exited with the negotiation or initiate the transitions usually have better post-retirement fate and argued that data as an incentive for the willingness of military rule to accept the transition.

Military, in its nature, is a part of state institutions. It is not supposed to represent anyone but to simply carry out the functions of the state that are assigned to the military. In authoritarian regimes, there is usually a part of a society whose interests that authoritarian government prioritizes or represents. Political parties usually have a clear idea of who they are supposed to represent. Some theories predicted that autocratic regimes usually ally with the rich and prioritize their interests. However, usually, military leaders do not come from a rich family and they do not necessarily ally with the rich always either. Another important element that military rule lack is tools to reward the loyalists either. Parties usually use their structures and institutions to reward their clients and members. Party offices at all levels are places where they give incentives such as career development and other material resources. These rewards and incentives are also alternative ways to deter the potential threat from opponents rather than oppression. The military institutions are not structured to give incentives and rewards like

parties. Even though they have a direct and legitimate reason to access the state's resources, access can be granted only to the members. Unlike in parties, the members of the military are serving full time and it is their profession. So, the rewards are strictly the salary and return for their works rather than the privilege. To sum up, the absence of party like structure in the military deprived the military of the chance to mobilize the public and give the incentive to maintain the support. (Geddes, Frantz, and Wright 2014; Gandhi 2008; Kim and Kroeger 2018)

The third and final explanation of fragility of the military regime is also associated with maintaining the support as well. All parties and personalist authoritarian regimes usually have the ideology they are devoted to and their policies are usually made based on that ideology. They usually try to spread the ideology among the public as well and it is one of the techniques to maintain the support. The ideology also gives a way to predict the policy and who they will be mainly representing. Once again, for the military is (originally) not structured to make policy or to have an ideology. Their task is to follow the policy made by the government. From the military regimes in both Latin America and South-East Asia, it can easily be spotted that, based on the ideology of leader or the leaders of the military rule, the policy they adopted are different significantly. However, the ideology of a leader cannot be translated to the ideology of the regime either. (Kim and Kroeger 2018; Magaloni 2008)

Both (Kim and Kroeger 2018) and (Geddes, Frantz, and Wright 2014) argued that collegial military regimes are even more fragile than the personalist military regime mainly because of the first explanation. They argue that it is easier to emerge the disagreement among the collegial military regime. The disagreement can be expected even from the leadership corps and make the regime vulnerable. In the personalistic military regime, as the power is concentrated in the hands of a person alone, the regime is usually safe from the internal factions. The external shocks such as economic situations or death of the grand leader are usually the critical junctures for personalist military regime to end.

Chapter 2. Historical background of Myanmar's military regime

The way the Myanmar military emerges and how they rose to power is nothing new to the trend that post-colonial third world countries experienced. Myanmar's military was originated from the attempts to make rebellions against the British. The military had been already well institutionalized by the end of World War II (even before independence in 1948). The first government of independent Myanmar is a democratic parliamentary regime. However, the democratic regime lasted merely a decade. In 1958, U Nu, Prime Minister, handed the office to General Ne Win with a two-year mandate. In the official letter written to General Ne Win, Prime Minister requested him to restore the law and order in the country. An election was held by 1960 and the office was handed back to the civilian government peacefully. However, the military staged a coup d'état in 1962 claiming the current discussion between the central government and ethnic group will lead to excessive decentralisation and, eventually, the disintegration of the Union. (Steinberg 2001; Maung Aung Myoe 2014; Tin Maung Maung Than 2003; Taylor 2009)

Myanmar was under the military rule from 1962 to 1974 (under the name of Revolutionary Council). It was well known that Ne Win tried to consolidate the power in his hand. However, there was internal opposition earlier in the regime. For instance, his first idea to establish a one-party state was rejected by his fellow military officers. He could later substitute those opponents and filled the leadership corps with his loyal followers. (Seekins 2002) In 1974, a new constitution was adopted and transformed the country into a socialist one-party state. Revolutionary Council was abolished, and he also resigned from the military. Then, he became chairman of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party. (Taylor 2009; Steinberg 2001)

With the conceptualisation of (Gandhi 2008), Ne Win would be qualified as a Military dictator in post-1974 period as well because he did not get the office by contested election and he was a former military officer. However, he was not governing through the armed force.

Instead, the Party is the main tool he used to mobilise the people, maintain support and loyalty. Plus, he did not have any elite constraints imposed by either military officers or party member. He was usually referred to as "Number One" because of his monopolisation of power. (Seekins 2002; Taylor 2009) For he needed not to consider the elite constraints from military and party, I would regard his regime as a personalist authoritarian regime rather than a military regime. Consequently, I will not include his regime in my analysis. Like the prediction of the theory of Geddes et al. (2014), Ne Win ousted by the popular uprising and the main reasons was the domestic economic situation.

In 1988, a popular uprising asking for democracy spread throughout the country. It was the largest demonstration Myanmar has ever seen a date to present causing the shutdown of almost every governmental function. Those demonstrations were ended by a violent coup d'état.

Military officials, at the time of coup d'état, promised that the intervention by Tatmadaw⁵ would be temporary, the election would be held, and the office will be given to the civilian government. The election was held in 1990. However, the result of the election was never realized. Instead, the military regime stayed in power for another two decades.

Military regime governed the country through armed forces. After the coup d'état in 1988, senior officials established SLORC and later changed the name to SPDC. Except for the change of name, the functions of the council remained the same. Both councils are exclusively composed by military officers. While Than Shwe, chairman of the Council of SLORC and later SPDC might be the most powerful and most prominent publicly, all important political decisions were made by those councils. In the council, each officer has their ministerial posts – just like in a cabinet – and they enjoy certain autonomy in their fields. However, major decisions were to be taken collectively in the council. State media covered the news of all the members

⁵ Tatmadaw means military (but not the regime)

of councils regularly and they also assumed the ceremonial roles respectively. (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2011; 2009)

These are the reasons why I will consider Myanmar's military regime as a collegial military regime. First, the head of government is constrained by the other elites in the ruling regime. Second, the decision is made collectively. They govern through the armed forces and their central governing agency is entirely composed by military officials. Myanmar military regime being a collegial one made the puzzle even more complicated because the collegial military is theoretically supposed to be more fragile and short-lived.

The path to democracy started in 2008 when the referendum for constitution was held. According to the government, over 90% of the voters voted for the new constitution. However, the integrity was largely questionable (Nilsen and Tønnesson 2012). The 2008 guaranteed the official involvement of military in the politics. According to the constitution, twenty-five percent of the parliament seats – both at national and regional level – will be appointed by the commander-in-chief.

Not only the President will not be the commander-in-chief but also president alone cannot decide who will be the commander-in-chief. President need the approval of the National Defence and Security Council – whose decisions are essential especially in the time of emergencies and crisis – to appoint the commander-in-chief. In NDSC, there are eleven members and six members are from military. In order to constitutional amendments, more than seventy-five percent of members of parliament must vote for it making the constitutional amendments impossible without the support of the military who have twenty-five percent of the parliament seats.

Despite all the above stated undemocratic features of 2008 constitution, it surely paved the way for the election. Since 1990, military regime never held an election. There was no

parliament and the country was governed with degrees made by SLORC or SPDC instead of legislations made by the parliament.

The 2008 constitution brought two changes that is important to my research. First, the head of government is no longer a current member of the military. With 2008 constitution, parliament will elect the president and a current member of military can no longer be head of government or state.⁶ Second, the policymaking is no longer controlled by the military. Military still have a say in policy making but they do not have the official complete control anymore. The country is no longer governed through the military either. For these reasons, according to my conceptualisation of military regime, the military regime in Myanmar disappeared in 2011 with emergence of new civilian or at least quasi-civilian government. As only the regime between 1988 and 2011 fit into my conceptualisation of military regime, the analysis will be done only on that period.

Throughout that period, the military regime in Myanmar showed the persistent stability. The changes in the leadership were quite frequent from 1988 to 1992. The composition of leadership became stable starting from 1992 onwards. Some changes emerged again in 2004 but, compared to other collegial military regimes, Myanmar military regime remains stable throughout two decades of their regimes. There were some tensions and disagreements for the decisions made in the council, but no armed rebellious attempts happened to take down the military regime.

Another particularity of Myanmar's military regime is the re-election of the members of SPDC. In most of the collegial military regimes, the military officers do not run in the election.

⁶ In Myanmar, the president is both head of government and head of state but he or she is not elected directly by the people. Instead, parliament elect the president. Lower house and upper house must propose a presidential candidate each. The military representatives from both houses combined must propose another candidate. The parliament as a whole vote for the president. The other two candidates become vice-Presidents. However, the constitution prevents a current member of military to become president.

Usually, the personalist military dictator and personalist dictator run in the first contested election. In Myanmar, several key leaders in SPDC resigned from the Council and formed their party. Amid the electoral controversies in 2010 election, they won. In the 2015 election, the opposition party won the election.

Even today, Tatmadaw is still present in the political life both official way and an unofficial way for 25 % of the members of parliament both at national and regional levels are directly appointed by the military, according to the constitution.

An only limited number of researches has been conducted on the longevity of the military regime. In his two articles, Kyaw Yin Hlaing argued that Myanmar's military regime could survive because they could eliminate the internal fractions among military senior officials and limit the boundaries of power for all the senior officers in the collegial regime(Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2011; 2009). However, he failed to consider that the breakdown of the regime can come from the grass-root level as well as outside the military regime. Other literature explain that the military regime is the only strong institution left in the country while the opposition is fractured. However, they usually considered the strength of military or the fragments of the opposition as given facts. They also did not take into factor if the military can be responsible for the fragmentation of the opposition.

Thus, the longevity of Myanmar's military regime has not yet been analysed from the institutional and functional perspective. I will try to fill this literature gap by explaining the longevity of Myanmar's military regime from institutional perspectives.

Chapter 3. Theory and Research Design

3.1 Building theory for Myanmar military regime

Having mentioned above, Kim and Kroeger (2018) stated that military regime lack three essential advantages that political parties possess, namely, giving their loyalists the access to the state's resources⁷, vertical power-sharing among the party members and source of ideology. Being a lack of these advantages, military regimes are more vulnerable to the political and economic challenges came from both outside and inside the ruling elite, compared to party-led or personalistic dictatorships. (Kim and Kroeger 2018; Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Brian Lai and Dan Slater 2006; Magaloni 2008)

From the above theory, one point becomes prominent; the most crucial aspect is not the presence of the party, but the functions of the party. So, as long as a mechanism or an institution that can generate the above three functions of a party, that authoritarian regime is more likely to survive longer. However, just the mere existence of institutions cannot be sufficient. Gandhi & Przeworski (2007) stated that "Rulers who institutionalize sufficiently, governing with either the optimal or greater amount of institutionalization, should survive in power longer than those rulers who under institutionalized"(Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1290). I draw the hypothesis that *if a military regime has a strong institution that can serve three institutional advantages of the political parties, they will be able to face the political and economic challenges – came from both inside and outside – and will be able to survive.*

Through existing institutions of Tatmadaw, Myanmar's military regime can give certain advantages to its members. Under the "Tatmadaw membership", its members have been enjoying higher pays and certain privileges than the rest of Myanmar's society. Some young

⁷ In party-led or personalistic dictatorships, thanks to regime's structure and functions, it is relatively easier to give state's resources to larger numbers of the loyalists (based one party memberships, economic class, etc.). I, military regime, there is no party members or a class they particularly represent. The closest loyalists they can find are only members of the military.

people are also choosing a military career because of their education and social advantages. (Selth 2002) Tatmadaw also even provides the major health care system for family members and their children can pursue education through the military regime (Steinberg 2001).

The military regime could also solve the problems of vertical power-sharing by extending their power sphere to the other sectors. Some military officers are appointed at the civilian post while they are still holding the military status. Their civilian positions are usually higher than their military ones. It had the two purposes; first, solving the power-sharing problem and second, keep the whole bureaucratic system more closely under their eye.

Tatmadaw does not have the ideology such as communism or liberalism. However, for Tatmadaw had long political tradition even before independence (Maung Aung Myoe 2014), they have certain ideas and values that are core to Tatmadaw. National unity, national interest and security are the crucial value of Tatmadaw implying the country is always in “*a state of perpetual war*” (Seekins 2002, 275) and they try to make them the values of Myanmar as well. Tin Maung Maung Than said “*National unity is also portrayed as the paramount national interest and security is the overriding factor in all spheres of human activity in Myanmar*” (Tin Maung Maung Than 2010, 127)

3.1.1 Ethnic cleavages in Myanmar

My thesis will not specifically focus on the ethnic cleavages. Instead, it is to examine how the military regime undertake the functions that can be only found in one-party authoritarian regimes. However, there are evidence that the military regime used the ethnic cleavages to keep the opposition fractured. They used those cleavages to share the state’s resources – which is one of the functions that one-party regimes do.

Thus, it will be an incomplete analysis if I overlook the ethnic cleavages and the opposition in studying the longevity of Myanmar’s military regime. The opposition of

Myanmar can be roughly divided into two types. First is the pro-democracy group led by NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. Second is the Ethnic armed organisations. There are also ethnic political parties but most of them are affiliated with EAOs. Very few studies have been done on the relation among EAOs and even less on the relation between NLD and EAOs under the military regime. Recent incidents after 2015 elections and peace negotiations under the NLD government shed light on communication between EAOS and NLD and how differently they see on the federal issues. SNLD turned down the proposal of NLD to take a seat in cabinet claiming that they were not included in the discussion of cabinet forming. (Eleven 2018) The president of SNLD also publicly said NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi does not trust the EAOs either. (RFA 2017) Another example is the temporary withdrawal of KNU from the peace negotiations. As of writing this thesis, KNU has not re-joined the peace process yet. Lieutenant General of KNU claimed that the peace process is just a fake process and NCA is nothing but a word. (Karen News 2018)

Dahl defined a cleavage as *“any difference within a society that is likely to polarize people into severely antagonistic camps”*(Dahl, 1971, 106) He explained that cleavages can come in different forms; class, religion, ethnicity, etc. The cleavages based on religion or ethnicity are stronger and dangerous than the class cleavages. According to him, ethnic cleavages are prone to conflict between groups and can reduce the prospects of democratisation. The conflict can be more permanent if there's one majority group which are much larger than the other minorities because the majority will not consider adopting the conciliatory actions. (Dahl 1971)

In Myanmar, the existence of ethnic cleavages is evident from the existence of ethnic political parties, their mobilizations along the ethnic lines and the existence of EAOs. According to the 1983 census, Bamar ethnic group represents 69% of the population. The second-largest ethnic group is Shan with 8.5% followed by Kayin with 4.2%. Myanmar also

possesses a stronger majority ethnic group which can make the conflict more damaging. Thus, in the analysis, I will study if the ethnic cleavages hinder the cooperation among the opposition fractions and result in inefficiency and help the longevity of the military government.

3.1.2 Religious cleavages

In politics of today's Myanmar, the religious cleavages are playing a more important role because of the ongoing Rohingya crisis. However, in analysing the longevity of military regime, the ethnic cleavages were relevant because ethnic cleavages were a tool to keep the opposition from cooperation among EAOs. Thus, the religious cleavages will not be discussed in detail but I will present a case-study where the military government use the religious cleavages within KNU to break it up.

3.2 Research Design

Hypothesis

Myanmar's military regime could survive because it could adopt the functions of the political party into their existing institutions in the absence of a unified strong opposition

Method

I will adopt the process-tracing method for two reasons.

First, in this analysis, it is important to analyse how the result of each event produces another event which led to the longevity of Myanmar's military regime. The process-tracing method will let me analyse the events per events and follow the development in each step.

Second, the events are interconnected and so are the functions of the Tatmadaw and their consequences. For instance, even though the ethnic cleavages exist since the pre-independent era, the actions of the military reinforced the ethnic cleavages as well.

Analysis

I will look into the three party-like functions produced by the institutions of the military regime. For the power-sharing, I will use the existing literature and archival research to show how the power-sharing among the elite as well as how the elite composition is done. In order to get a better understanding of the power sharing, I will use in-depth interviews. My interviews include the top military officials who served in the military regime.

For giving loyalists access to state's resources, on one hand I will use the archival research to know which official privileges were given to the member of the Tatmadaw. On other hand, I will analyse, using in-depth interviews, the EAOs who signed the cease-fire agreements to the state's resources. The interviewees are the leaders of the EAOs as well as the military officials who were involved in negotiating the cease-fire agreements.

For ideology, I will mainly use content analysis of the speech and statements as well as the materials published by the military.

For the last two parts – access to states's resources and ideology, I will also point out the critical junctures where the behaviours of the military regime significantly change. The critical junctures also show the steps the military regime took to consolidate their power. As the first part is about the elite composition and power-sharing among elites, it is difficult to get any information because few documents are made public.

3.3 Contribution

My thesis will add a new perspective on regime change and typology of authoritarian regimes. Departing from the tradition of focusing only on the institutions as well as making typology only based on the institution, I will point out the function that will be carried out by these institutions are also important. This thesis will also bring the attention of versatility of the institutions under authoritarian regimes, especially the military regime.

Myanmar being the case study of this study, the thesis will also contribute to the literature of Myanmar's politics as well. This research will contribute to the literature in two ways. First, the longevity of Myanmar's military regime will be explained from both sides – military and opposition. Existing literature explained the military regime only by how the military became stronger and missed to explain the opposition. (Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2011; 2009; Selth 2002; Tin Maung Maung Than 2003; Maung Aung Myoe 2014) The main focus of my thesis is not the ethnic cleavages in Myanmar. However, the interaction between the military regime and Ethnic Armed Organisations was thoroughly studied in the thesis. There is an extended literature on ethnic conflicts of Myanmar but they failed to link with the longevity of the regime. I will explain how these two factors are interconnected. Second, my thesis will identify the ideology used by the military regime in Myanmar. Before, there is no research that specifically the discourse of military as a coherent ideology. Existing literature on authoritarian regime insists that a military regime does not possess an ideology. This thesis will explain how a military regime can create an ideology that can justify their stay in the office.

Chapter 4. Power-sharing in Myanmar's military regime

One of the most remarkable advantage of one-party regimes have over the military regimes is their institutions is their institutional structure for power-sharing. In this chapter, I will present the analysis of how the military regime fulfil this function to share power without the institutions of one-party regimes. For this analysis, I will use the existing literature, in-depth interviews and archival research on official documents.

Magaloni (2008) argued that the dictators need to adopt a power-sharing arrangement for the sake of their longevity in the office. Dictators usually face the challenges such as coups, demonstrations and other attempts to overthrow them from the office. Sometimes, coups come from the within the elite itself. Magaloni claims that it is crucial for the dictators to avoid abusing the loyal friends and to contain those loyal friends in the ruling elite by adopting “a credible power-sharing arrangement”. Credible power-sharing which can be translated into real power to make policy need to be governed to the loyal friends of the ruling elites. If the potential rivals (in the ruling elites) are invested enough in the current regime, they will become more committed to the regime leaving the chance of coup or rebellion very low. In order to achieve that commitment, the royal friends need to be given positions in government that have a say in policy making as well as spoils and privilege. However, in this chapter, I will analyse only how the positions in government are shared. The spoils and privileges will be studied in the next chapter.

By sharing the decision-making power and office with the loyal friends, the dictator made them invested in the regime which they would not have otherwise. Magaloni also stressed that “a credible power-sharing arrangement” can take the uncertainty out of the equation and can reduce the dilemma among the elites. One question – he admits in the same article – unresolved is, if the power-sharing arrangement in one-party or competitive authoritarianism proves to be effective, why the other regime do not establish the parties as parallel political

organisations and do the power-sharing arrangement. This chapter will give an answer to this question because my analysis will explain how military regime in Myanmar did the power-sharing without a party-structure.

4.1 Power-sharing at regional level

Until 1988, Myanmar was under one-party rule of BSPP with Central Executive Committee at the top of that political system. Each region and division have regional party units as well as party-state officials who has the decision power in the regions. However, one-party rule in Myanmar was very centralized and the real decision-making power always lied in the hand of Central Executive Committee. (Hlaing 2003) 1988 uprisings marked for the collapse of both political and economic system of Myanmar(Taylor 2009). At the end of uprisings and military coup d'état, both the Central Executive Committee and the regional party units disappeared. State Peace and Development Committee which was exclusively formed by military generals immediately replaced the Central Executive committee and become the most important central institution of Myanmar for next 20 years. However, for the regional level, they took a very different approach.

Military opted to use neither the civilian bureaucracy nor creating a new institution with a decision-making power. Instead, military decided to keep the power-sharing arrangement in the military itself. The regional commanders of each command become de facto head of government for those state or division as well.⁸ Without forming new political unit which will be responsible for policy making and decision making, the military regional commanders were given the status that will be equivalent to the governors in the United States. There were no ministers at the regional level and the entourage of the regional governor became the cabinet for him as well. In this way, in all 14 states/divisions, the regional power vacuum was finally

⁸ A top leader of the military regime, interview by author, March 5, 2020

given to the military and it remained in the military until the transfer of office to civilian government in 2011.

As Magaloni (2008) pointed out, Myanmar military regime also made sure that their power-sharing system is credible as well. They did not follow the pattern of BSPP where the regional party units were mere powerless party bureaucratic offices. Real decision-making power was given to the regional commander. Both in cases of emergencies and the regular affairs, regional commanders were given an almost full authority to make decisions without needing to consult in prior.⁹ There are some guidelines to follow in making decisions, but the regional commanders need not to consult for every decision to make. They were also allowed to make their own projects and their own implementation plans in their own regions as well.¹⁰ They also have a strict custom among the regional commanders to not interfere in the affairs of each other's region.

It does not mean that there is no control over the regional commanders. First, they need to follow the general plans laid down by SPDC. Second, they need to report their projects and plans to SPDC. The reporting usually take place in the regular meetings held every four months.¹¹ Those meetings were usually mediated in the state-run newspapers. How the heads of SPDC made plan and give guidelines to the regional commanders were described regularly when they covered the quarter yearly meetings. The reports made by regional commanders were usually not mentioned in the newspaper. However, the regional commanders also get the national news coverage when their new projects start or finish.¹²

By giving the decision power to them, military regimes made the regional commanders and their entourage to invest in the regime. The risk of rebellion became larger than the reward

⁹ A top leader of the military regime, phone interview by author, April 09, 2020

¹⁰ A top leader of the military regime, interview by author, March 5, 2020

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Archival research between 8 and 14 March 2020

of loyalty. By investing in the regime, not only did they get a political status but also get access to the spoils as well. The rule of non-interference in each other's region also guarantee their access to the state's spoils and state's resources without consequences. Due to the consistent way of sharing power, they could acknowledge well to the loyal friends how the power will be shared among the loyal friends. Consequently, it gave the incentives to the members of military – who has not reached yet to the rank of regional commander - in investing to the regime for it was sure that they will enjoy the same privileges of a state/division's governor when they become regional commanders. Even if not, they can still be part of the entourage of the regional commander and get access to spoils and other privileges.

4.2 Penetrating the bureaucracy

Even before the transfer of the regional decision-making power, the military was present in Myanmar's bureaucracy. Ne Win being a former military general, he used the military personnel in both Central Executive Committee as well as in bureaucracy. Under BSPP, at least 1743 military personnel were transferred to the civilian posts (most of them maintain their military title at the same time).

Table 3. Transfer from the Military to other government organisation (1972-1988)

Government Organisation	No. of Transfer
People's Councils	794
Ministry of Industry	166
Ministry of Home Affairs & Religion	155
Security and Administration Committee	92
Minsitry of Trade	79
Ministry of Transportation and Communication	77
Ministry of Industry 2	68
Ministry of Mine	57
Ministry of Livestock and Fishery	44
Ministry of National Planning	32
Ministry of Energy	25
Ministry of Construction	22
National Bureau of Intelligence	20
Ministry of Foreign Affairs	19

Ministry of Information	17
Office of State Council Chairman	10
Ministry of Social Welfare	9
Office of Prime Minister	8
Ministry of Health	7
Others	7
n.a.	6
Total	1743

Source : (Nakanishi 2013)

The number of military personnel which were transferred to the civilian posts significantly increased during the military regime. According to Hook et al., military believed that the 1988 uprisings were the result of the inadequacy of the civilian administration and they tried to make “the army substituted itself for the state [and the] weakness of civilian institutions was compensated for by the relative strength of the military,”. Under SPDC, military personnel represented the 50% of the directors and senior positions of ministries.(Hook et al. 2015, 12–13)

When military personnel are transferred to the civilian posts, they usually got the posts that can be considered superior than their current military rank. For instance, most of the military personnel who got the position of general director – which is the highest bureaucratic position for civilians – are lieutenant colonel and colonel – which is more of a middle-ranged position.

By inserting the middle-ranged military officers to the bureaucracy, military regime got two things done. Firstly, they widened the arena for power-sharing. While the regional commanders who are also high-ranking officers got the chance to make the decision for their specific regions, a limited number of middle-ranged military officer were given the chance to lead the bureaucratic office. It compensated the disadvantage of rigidity of hierarchy in the military which lead to narrow power-sharing arena(Gandhi and Przeworski 2007). In most ministries, both ministry and deputy ministry are usually from military. Thanks to the re-

assignments, the directors general, highest appointed bureaucrats are also from the military. Thus, secondly, the military also got the chance to keep an eye on every step of the way from policy initiation to policy implementation. Decision-making is shared in different ways, but it was shared only among the loyal friends.

4.3 Power-sharing among the elites

For this section, I will use the analysis of Kyaw Yin Hlaing (2009) where he conducted the 25 in-depth interviews with military generals, business and relatives close to the general as well. Using those interviews, he reached to the conclusion that the golden rule of non-intervention was the one that make the unity of military regime possible and that avoid the fractions like other military regimes. Kyaw Yin Hlaing argued that the rule of non-intervention is not the invention of SLORC and SPDC, but rather an inheritance from the BSPP. One interviewee who served in BSPP explained why they need to keep distance from each other.

“It was like a cultural norm we all abided by. Nobody wanted to be seen as a trouble-maker, so we all tried to do what we were asked to do. We tried not to have problems with any of our colleagues. If we fought with one another, we would be viewed as trouble-makers. Once we became trouble-makers in the eyes of our superiors, especially U Ne Win, we would not get promoted to important positions.”(Kyaw Yin Hlaing 2009, 278)

He pointed out that there are already sub-fractions in the Tatmadaw when the military regime come into power. The most prominent one is the military intelligence, which is headed by Khin Nyunt, who held the third highest place in SPDC and who was also the Prime Minister. Khin Nyunt, together with his followers in the military intelligence have the full authority in ethnic affairs, international relations and education. The interviews I conducted with both ethnic armed groups and top leaders of military who involved in the negotiations with EAOs confirmed that Khin Nyunt decided the terms of negotiations himself and the other generals did not intervene.

From the analysis of the chapter, it became evident that military regime went against the odds and made the power-sharing arena larger than usual. They managed to make “a credible power-sharing arrangement” by making three ways of power-sharing. First, giving the decision-making power of a governor to the regional commanders. Second, giving civilian senior position to the middle-ranged military officers and third, the rule of non-intervention among the ruling elites.

Chapter 5. Giving state's resources to loyalists

One of the advantages of a one-party regimes over military regimes is their ability to give state's resources to their followers via party apparatus. In one-party regimes, the party members are usually given the access to the state's resources either in the form of career development or material benefits because the party and the state are fused under those regimes. (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007; Gandhi 2008) Unlike one-party regimes, military has the rigid membership and they usually failed to distribute the spoils to have loyal base (Kim and Kroeger 2018).

However, in Myanmar, resource-sharing to the loyalists was achieved despite the absence of party institutions. The resource-sharing to the loyalists was done via two channels – through the members of Tatmadaw and the EAOs. This chapter is composed of two sections. In the first section, I will examine how the state's resources are given to the members of Tatmadaw. Analyses on the privilege of military personnel such as higher salary and other benefits that the other civil servants do not enjoy as well as post-retirement income thorough military-run corporations will be included. For this section, I mainly relied on the official documents and archival data to present the privileges enjoyed per military.

In the second section, the analyses on the agreements with EAOs will be presented. I will argue that the cease-fire agreement served to share the state-resources as well as to keep the EAOs from cooperating away from each other. The critical junctures in relations with EAOs and how it affected the consolidation of military power in the country will be analysed in this section. The analyses mainly rely on the interviews I conducted with the leaders of EAOs and the senior officials of military who were in the negotiations. I will also discuss two specific cases where military used the ethnic and religious cleavages to break up the EAOs.

5.1 Privileges of the Tatmadaw

The salary of the members of Tatmadaw are usually higher than their civilian counterparts and the other benefits differed significantly. Tatmadaw is, even in present day, the only bureaucratic branch that has an effective health care system. The healthcare system of Tatmadaw is accessible not only to the members but also to the family of members. (Selth 2002)

Table 4. Comparison of salary between the members of military and their civilian counterparts

	Amount of monthly salary (in kyat)	Amount of monthly salary (in kyat) for civilian counterparts ^a
Colonel	550000	550000
Lieutenant Colonel	451000	418000
Major	396000	374000
Captain	352000	341000
Lieutenant	319000	308000
Second Lieutenant	308000	275000
Warrant Officer Class One	258000	234000
Warrant Officer Class Two	240000	216000
Staff Sergeant	222000	198000
Sergeant	204000	180000
Corporal	186000	162000
Lance Corporal	168000	144000
^a This column shows the salary of the civilian civil servants whose positions are equal to the ones of the military officers. Source: Ministry of Defence, Ministry of Educaiton		

Military regime also created two giant corporations that will later become two of the biggest companies who will play monopoly in the Myanmar's market. The first enterprise known as Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited was created in 1988 following the coup d'état. The second one known as Myanmar Economic Cooperation was founded in 1997, the same year where the name of SLORC was changed to SPDC showing their intention to stay as a regime rather than a care-taker government as planned before. (ICG 2012)

The MEC is composed of 34 numbers of companies in the sectors of manufacturing, financial services, telecommunication and transport. UMEH is more discrete about its activities than UMEH but, according to the report submitted by International Fact-finding mission on

Myanmar to Human Rights Council, there are 57 companies affiliated to UMEH and the market value of UMEH is estimated 117 million US \$ in 2017. Most of UMEH affiliated companies are invested in manufacturing and resources extraction such as germs, oil and gas. (Human Rights Council 2019)

Both corporates are owned by military. Part of the yearly benefits return of both corporates goes to the reserved fund of military. Some amount of the yearly benefits are also “used to support welfare organizations of the regime, veteran organisations and retired military personnel”(Bünte 2017, 102; ICG 2012).

Table 5. Companies of MEC

No.	Companies of MEC	Sectors
1.	Tyre Retreading Plant	Manufacturing
2.	High Tension Steel Bolts. Nuts and Washers Manufacturing Plant	
3.	Disposable Syring Factory	
4.	Refractory Plant	
5.	Tri Star Tyre Factory	
6.	360 TPD Rice Mill and Rice Storage	
7.	Gas Plant	
8.	Marble Mine and Processing Plant	
9.	Glass Factory	
10.	Galvanized Iron Sheet Factory	
11.	Myanmar Sigma Wire and Cable Factory	
12.	Tea Power and Tea Mix Factory	
13.	Dagon Dairy Plant	
14.	Nay Pyi Taw Ye Pyar Drinking Water Plant	
15.	Sugar Mill (Du Yin Gabo)	
16.	Sugar Mill (Kanhla)	
17.	Sugar Mill (Kanbalu)	
18.	No. 2 4000 TPD Process Cement Plant	
19.	No. 1 900 TPD Process Cement Plant	
20.	Ship Breaking Yard (Thilawa)	
21.	No. 3 Steel Mill	
22.	No. 2 Steel Mill and Fabrication Shop (Myaungdagar)	
23.	No. 1 Steel Rolling Mill (Kyauk Swae Kyoe)	
24.	Dagon Fresh Lemon Sparking	Beverages
25.	Dagon Rum Factory	
26.	Myanmar Mobile Money Services	Services
27.	Myanmar Economic Corporation Telecommunication	

28.	Aung Myint Moh Min Insurance Company	Transports
29.	Innwa Bank Limited	
30.	Ywama Transport	
31.	Hteedan Port	
32.	Ahlon International Port Terminal	Telecommunication
33.	Ayeyarwaddi Mobile Phone allocation	
34.	Remote Sensing Ground Station	

Source: MEC website

5.2 Resource-sharing with EAOs

5.2.1 The long history of ethnic conflicts

Myanmar is a country which is ethnically very diverse. 135 ethnic groups are speaking more than 50 languages currently recognised by the state although this category is under numerous criticisms. The ethnic conflicts are the one Myanmar inherited since independence. The civil war broke out just weeks after independence in 1948. While the scale of the civil war has been significantly decreased in today's Myanmar – especially in central areas where Bamar, majority ethnic group resides, since the conflicts continue in the border areas and no substantive political agreement haven't been reached between the government and ethnic armed groups (EAOs), Myanmar is technically still in the civil war.

Before or even under British occupation, all the ethnic groups that composed Myanmar today had never made a country together. All the regions – except Kayar region – was under British rule as British Burma. However, British Burma is divided into two parts. First part is Burma Proper, composed by the regions where Bamar, the majority ethnic group resides, and the second part is Frontier Areas where ethnic minorities reside. British adopted two different ways of administrations in these two different areas. It is only in 1948 that two administrative

parts became one country under one system and it was a last-minute decision made by Panglong agreement¹³.

Panglong agreement was controversial because it was not inclusive and most of the ethnic groups such as Kayin and Kayar were excluded from the conference. Kayin boycotted Panglong conference because they were granted only the observational status and, subsequently, Kayin leaders also boycotted the constituent assembly resulted from 1947 election. So, Kayin was completely exempted from the creation of the Union. Kayin has rejected the right to have its state, unlike Shan and Kachin. Kayin armed group, KNU was the first armed group based on ethnic cleavages to enter the civil war. (Walton 2008; Taylor 2009; Steinberg 2001; South 2008) Soon after, many armed ethnic groups emerged and followed the path of KNU.

By 1958, Shan – the largest ethnic group after Bamar, had the legal right to secede from the Union. This is the right Panglong agreement gave to Shan exclusively. One decade after independence, ethnic conflicts are still going on and the federal state, promised by Panglong agreement, is not realised either¹⁴. Some ethnic movement, notably the Federal Movement, emerged in the late 1950s. In March 1962, a conference was held to discuss the political matters and federal arrangements between the government and ethnic leaders. It is when Ne Win executed the 1962 coup d'état arguing that Union is now leading to disintegration. He explicitly stated, "Federalism is impossible, it will destroy the Union". Under his regime, SLORC and SPDC, the word 'federalism' was equated to secession and became a taboo.

5.2.1 The cease-fire agreements under SLORC and SPDC

¹³ Panglong agreement (signed on 12 February 1947) was the agreement signed by three ethnic groups of Frontier Areas – Shan, Kachin and Chin – agreeing to take the independence together with Proper Burma instead of taking independence as a separate country.

¹⁴ Panglong agreement does not mention federalism explicitly but certain rights for the state – such as financial and cultural autonomy for minority ethnic state – correspond to the federal characteristics.

All the governments of Myanmar before SLORC tried to enter the agreements with EAOs but failed. One distinct feature of SLORC (and later SPDC) is that they could enter into a ceasefire agreement with most of EAOs. However, these ceasefire agreements are strictly to stop the battle and none of the political matters was not discussed or agreed in those agreements. The purpose of the agreements was strictly to stop the armed battle.¹⁵ The agreements are not the consensus between the government and all EAOs. Instead, ceasefire agreements were made on a bilateral basis between the government and each of the EAO. The demands and benefits are also significantly different from each other.

The agreements proved that the intention of the negotiation is not a step to political discussions or to end the ethnic conflicts. Instead, the agreements serve to weaken the opposition by dividing them according to the existing ethnic cleavages.

The agreements asked the EAOs to not contact with the main opposition party – NLD. The EAOs also decided not to contact with NLD not only because it is required by the ceasefire agreements but also because the members of NLD are usually arrested for getting into contact with the governments.¹⁶ Although some EAOs asked that they want to negotiate the cease-fire agreements collectively, the military insisted that they will negotiate under the condition that each EAO will discuss with the government separately.¹⁷

In return, the military government agree to give subsidies to the EAOs and promise that the EAOs can keep their arms as long as they remain in their own territory. EAOs – especially the one who signed in the first waves – were given some privileges to do business in the central parts of Myanmar in special economic zones such as the industrial zones and hotel zones.¹⁸

¹⁵ However, some agreements were broken and renegotiated.

¹⁶ A leader of EAO, interview by author, February 28, 2020.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ A top leader of a military regime, interview by author, March 5, 2020

A leader of EAO, interview by author, February 28, 2020

5.2.3 Waves of ceasefire agreements

Win Min and Zaw Oo (2007) stated that ceasefire agreements came in waves and they divided the wave into four waves. I will argue that all the waves of ceasefire agreements – except the last one – coincided with the time that military regime is facing the crisis or challenge. (see table 1) The military used the agreements to keep the EAOs from forming into a single armed force that can challenge them or having a coherent strategy with pro-democracy movement (especially NLD) to turn against them.

Table 6. Waves of Cease-fire agreements

Waves	Date	EAOs	Challenge of the military regime
First wave (1989)	31 March 1989	Myanmar National Democratic Army (Kokang)	Pro-democracy movement
	9 May 1989	United Wa State Army	
	30 June 1989	National Democratic Alliance Army (Shan/Akha/Lisu)	
	15 December 1989	National Democratic Army (Kachin)	
	24 September 1989	Shan State Army	
Second wave (1991-1992)	11 January 1991	Kachin Democratic Army	1990 general election
	18 March 1991	Pa-O National Organisation	
	21 April 1991	Palaung State Liberation Party	
	27 February 1992	Kayah National Group	
Third Wave (1994-1995)	24 February 1994	Kachin Independence Organisation	Regime consolidation
	26 July 1994	Kayan Pyithit	
	5 September 1994	Kayinni National People's Liberation Front	
	9 October 1994	Shan State Nationalities People's Liberation Organisation	
	21 March 1995	Kayinni National Progressive Party	
Fourth Wave (1996-1997)	29 June 1995	New Mon State Party	
	5 January 1996	Shan State Army (Mong Tai Army)	
	4 June 1997	Burma Communist Party – Rakhine	

Source: (Win Min and Zaw Oo 2007; Taylor 2009; Smith 2005)

The first waves of ceasefire agreements arrived just after a few months the military take control of the country. It was during the aftermath of 8888 uprising in 1988 that marked both

the end of the socialist regime and the beginning of the military regime. At that time, in central Myanmar, the pro-democracy movement and uprisings were strong enough to throw a regime. During the socialist regime, all political parties were suppressed and EAOs are the only opposition to the regime. Since 1962, it is the first time that a regime of Myanmar faced strong opposition in central areas. a KNU and CPB took the opportunity to launch the battle while most troops are moved to central areas to handle the protest. After the brutal breakdown of the pro-democracy movement in coup d'état by military, students and refugee (about 10,000 people) who were involved in uprising fled to the areas controlled by EAOs. They got the military training and arms from the EAOs and founded ABSDF. In November 1988, more than 20 armed organisations including KNU, NMSP and ABSDF formed an alliance called Democratic Alliance of Burma(Callahan 2007; Taylor 2009; South 2003). The event of 1988 taught that the failure to sustain power in both central and border area at the same time and the merger of opposition groups can come with a great cost for the regime.

On the one hand, the military promised that their occupation of office will be only temporary, and they will hold an election in a few months. On the other hand, the military tried to enter into an agreement with the strongest EAOs. The EAOs – such as UWSA and SSA – that involved in the first waves are the largest and most advanced military forces among the EAOs(Taylor 2009). Plus, during the first wave, UWSA and MNDA are groups that departed from CPB and organised as separate groups based on the ethnic cleavages. The incident in which three groups left the CPB also indicated that the ideological cleavages became less relevant and ethnic cleavages replaced them. The first wave of a ceasefire made sure that the military regime will not face serious threats at two fronts at the same time.

The second waves of ceasefire agreements happened amid the domestic and international criticism for military failure to hand over the office to NLD who won the 1990

general election¹⁹. In the post-1990 election period, SLORC had the legitimacy crisis. In Shan and Rakhine, the ethnic parties won enough seats to have a majority in the regional parliaments. SLORC used the ceasefire as a process to rebuild the legitimacy. It is evident by the fact that the two out of the four EAOs who enter into the ceasefire agreements base in Shan state where an ethnic party won the majority of regional parliament. SLORC also announced that the 1990 general election was held not to form a government but to make a national convention which will serve as a constitutional assembly. Thus, representatives from ethnic groups needed to participate in the national convention to make the national convention legitimate. The benefits promised in the ceasefire negotiations

The third wave of ceasefire agreements is the one that let the military regime consolidate their power. In first and second waves, the ceasefire agreements are almost exclusively with the EAOs in Southeast parts of the country (Kachin and Shan states). The third and fourth waves of the ceasefires expand to all the rest of the border areas of the countries. After the third and fourth wave of the ceasefire agreements, in 1997, the regime changes the name from State Law and Order Restoration Committee to the State Peace and Development Committee. It implies that the order in the country has been restored by SLORC. The name of SPDC itself indicates the consolidation of the regime. In the aftermath of 8888 uprising, the promise is to make the transition smooth. The purpose of the military regime was just to restore the order in the country. The change of name sent a message that the military will hold to the power. The military in post-third wave became very strong and consolidated authority compared to post-second wave period where it was struggling for legitimacy.

The fourth wave was called surrender wave by Win Min and Zaw Oo (2007). They claimed that increasing numbers of EAOs entering ceasefire agreements with the military

¹⁹ NLD won 392 out of 485 seats and ethnic nationality parties won 67 seats combined.

government put pressure on the rest EAOs to negotiate and finally accept the terms of the military government.

These four waves of ceasefire showed a pattern when the military government tried to have negotiations with EAOs. In the first and second waves, the military was facing the crisis in which their survival was challenged. In the third wave coincided with the time they were trying to consolidate their power. Every wave corresponds to each step the military took for the regime stability. But did these ceasefire agreements serve the actual purpose of the military government? Why did ethnic groups decide to enter into an agreement with the military government after more than four decades of battle rather than to team up with pro-democracy? How did these ceasefire agreements change the political landscape of Myanmar?

5.2.4 Beyond agreements

From 1948 to today, none of the central governments could assert their power and authority every part of Myanmar. SLORC and SPDC are not exceptions either. However, the military government made sure the regions they can't assert their power will not threaten their power in central areas. In other words, they could manage to keep the border problems at the border and not to affect their authority in the central area.

Since 1948, some areas at the border were controlled by EAOs and they established a type of administration that involved some characteristics which are very close to the functions of a government and they become an alternative authority to the central government. For instance, in Mannerplaw (in Kayin state), KNU – in some parts, NMSP – collected taxes from the residents (South 2006; 2003). In Kachin state, only a few areas were in control of the central government and KIO controlled the rest of the Kachin state (Callahan 2007). Similarly, the northeast part of Shan state was also controlled by CPB. In these areas, the laws and authority of the central government were not in effect. EAOs offer services such as schools and hospitals

and judiciary actions as well. As EAOs controlled areas shared a border with either China or Thailand, some EAOs also have the border gate and control the trade relations as well. However, the border of the regions their authority can exercise is neither well-defined nor stable. Those borders are usually decided by the one who won in the most recent battle. In some regions, the residents had to pay taxes and their agricultural products to both sides – military and EAOs. The battle between the military and EAOs was not the only determinant for the borders. There were also battles between EAOs themselves as well. For instance, there was a series of intensive battles between KNU and NMSP emerged from the dispute of dividing the tax-collecting areas for both.

Callahan (2007) pointed out that political authorities in Myanmar can be divided into three different types based on who control the areas after the ceasefire agreements. First is the "devolution" where EAOs were granted the right to exercise their authority in clearly defined borders. Second is the "occupation" where military controlled. Third and the last is "coexistence" where military and EAOs are present at the same time but, in these regions, the military usually got more control over time.

Devolution was granted mostly to the EAOs involved in the first and second waves of ceasefire agreements. The first reason is that those groups are the strongest armed forces. The second reason is as these are the first EAOs to enter into the ceasefire agreements and the military gave the incentives by giving very strong devolution to these groups. UWSA (Wa) and MNDA (Kokang) got a very autonomous revolution. The offers of SLORC is different from its predecessors by letting the EAOs keep the arms in their areas. Its predecessors asked the armed organisations to completely abandon the arms to enter into the agreement. Very little to no regulation was put on how the economy operates how to have trade relations with foreign countries – especially China. In MNDA-controlled areas, casino business (partnered with China) were openly operated while the casinos are banned in central areas. In UWSA-controlled

regions, they could build their army as they wish and, as a result, UWSA became the strongest task force with the highest numbers of soldiers. (M. Smith 2007; Callahan 2007; Win Min and Zaw Oo 2007; Smith 2005; Taylor 2009)

The level of devolution granted was, however, different. With NMSP, the devolution served to allow cultural autonomy. NMSP was allowed to develop its own Mon curriculum and install a school system where the classes are taught in Mon language. Nowadays, they are at least 22 schools under the control of NMSP.

School system and curriculum in own language is a very high incentive for the EAOs because federalism where ethnic groups can freely express their cultural identity and can have their financial independence. Before independence (in Panglong conference) and in the early years of independence, the demands for a separate country were heard frequently. However, over time, most ethnic leaders shifted to the idea of federalism because of political reasons and feasibility. (Sakhong 2008; South 2006) The idea of a self-regulated economy of MNDA, a strong army in UWSA and mother-tongue school system of NMSP was very close to the idea of federalism. Moreover, it is a very big development compared to Ne Win's policy of "burmanisation" under the BSPP government. In that period, none of the ethnic identity was recognised except Bamar's. As all political parties and civil organisations were also suppressed, there is also no way for ethnic groups to politically mobilize. It was under the BSPP government, the number of EAO exploded as well. (South 2008; Seekins 2002)

However, the areas EAOs were allowed to control represents a very small percentage of the state of their ethnic groups. Although there may be 22 Mon-language schools under NMSP, they can only operate in a handful of towns in their areas. The rest of Mon state remain under the school system of the central government. Thus, in reality, it is still far from federalism.

In return for benefits and certain autonomy offered, EAOs were asked not to communicate with the pro-democracy movements, especially NLD and not to form an alliance between them. Another demand is to not criticize the military government and to support their policy. The military government showed tolerance when loose alliance forms between the EAOs. However, the military government is much less tolerant of communication with NLD and public disagreement with them. For example, when the NMSP public criticized the policy of SPDC, the developmental assistance and food supply was suspended immediately. (Win Min and Zaw Oo 2007)

The ceasefire could put a wall between NLD and EAOs and very few contacts were made between them.²⁰ By preventing the broad coalitions among EAOs, the military government could deter the potentials of armed attacks to the regime. By entering the agreements with EAOs, the military could transform fluid borders into solid ones and clearly define where their authority will be in force. In doing so, they have to concede only a few areas to EAOs while they are technically remaining in the Union. By reducing the battle, they also could devote more of their time and energy for power building in central areas.

5.2.5 The case of CPB

Communist Party of Burma (CPB) is the first group to start the civil war in 1948. Being apparent from the name, these armed groups were founded based on the ideology and by those who are discontent with the political system adopted by the government. With support from China, CPB quickly became the strongest insurgent in Myanmar in the early 1950s. However, because of the geopolitical changes in the late 1980s, China reduces the assistance significantly resulting in a weakened structure of CPB. (Lintner 1990) Later, ethnic cleavages became stronger. Firstly, a group comprised of Kokang ethnic people (MNDA) broke away from CPB in March. It was followed by the secession of the Wa ethnic

²⁰ The relations between NLD and EAOs as well as among themselves will be examined in separate sections later.

group (UWSA) one month later. And finally, a group comprised of Lahu, Akha and Shan separated again (Taylor 2009) and left the CPB with little forces and became irrelevant in the political stage. (Taylor 2009)

The official documents proved that military reached out to the group of CPB which will later become the MNDA and offered to make a ceasefire agreement since December 1987. In June 1989 just three months after the breakup from CPB, a group of military officials led by Khin Nyunt went to the area of Kokang ethnic group. Military government also had connection with Wa ethnic group in the CPB will later become UWSA prior to the breakup from CPB. The leaders of future-NMDA helped the military leaders to contact the leaders of Wa ethnic groups. (Defence Services Historical Research Institute 2000)

5.2.6 The case of KNU

Founded in 1947, KNU is one the largest EAOs in Myanmar. KNU is composed of seven districts acting as a de facto federation with its Congress being the highest authority. (Jolliffe 2016) The religious cleavages is between the Buddhists and the Christians. Most of the people in the leadership role of KNU are Christians while a large number of Buddhist exists in the KNU. That religious cleavages is also reflected in the population of Kayin ethnic group as well.

The tensions between the Christians and the Buddhists within the KNU emerged in 1994. The main reason is related to a missionary monk, Myaing Gyi Ngu sayadaw. He started rebuilding the pagodas in the Kayin state as part of his missionary project. KNU asked the monk to stop rebuilding the pagodas. The reason was that the location of the pagodas are closed to the military bases of KNU and they pagodas can make KNU vulnerable to the air strikes of Tatmadaw. Despite the request from the KNU, Myaing Gyi Ngu saydaw continued to rebuild the pagodas. The division was triggered when the KNU threw the materials for rebuilding the pagodas into the river. KNU accused that Myaing Gyi Ngu sayadaw was backed by the military government.²¹

²¹ A leader of KNU, interview by author, February 24, 2020.

Most of the Buddhist soldiers left the KNU. They founded a new group called DKBA and become the follower of Myaing Gyi Ngu Sayadaw. DKBA later teamed up with Tatamadaw and fought against the KNU. That division remain persistent and KNU and DKBA never reunited to this date.²²

The division of DKBA made KNU weak resulting for KNU to change the military technique. Before 1994, KNU even had the battle against the military that lasted up to one month. After the breakup, KNU is only capable of guerrilla attacks to save the human resource as well as material resource.²³

Military government used the existing military institutions to build the loyalty among the members of military by giving them certain privileges such as higher salary and other benefits. In this way, military accomplished the function of a one-party regime where party-members are given the spoils of the office. Military regime in Myanmar overcome the limited numbers of military members by giving the access of state's resources to EAOs. They do not become the loyalists or active supporters of military regime but it prevented them from rebelling against the regime.

²² A leader of DKBA, interview by author, February 28, 2020. The interviewee also confirmed that Myaing Gyi Ngu Sayadaw received the support from the military government.

²³ A leader of KNU, interview by author, February 28, 2020

Chapter 6. Ideology

In this chapter, I will focus on another disadvantage of military regime – lack of ideology. Both Magaloni (2008) and Svolik (2012) argued that the party-like structure not only gives the regimes to share power and build alliance but also to adopt the ideology which will later help to justify why they need to be in the office to their loyalists. In other words, ideology helps the process of legitimisation. Usually, the military does not have a particular ideology at their disposal when they come to the power leaving the legitimisation process difficult and weak.

Svolik (2012) showed that the most possible way for a military regime to legitimate is to use the foundational myth. That legitimisation is most relevant when “*parties that emerge from a successful national liberation struggle often claim an entitlement to steer the country’s future based on past achievements and a fusion of the (former) liberation movement and the state*”(Svolik 2012, 290). In this paper, I will argue that, although the legitimisation is based on the foundational myth, it becomes well extends beyond that and become an ideology.

6.1 Path of military in Southeast Asia

The argument that military regime usually lack the ideology is mainly drawn from the experience of the military regimes in Latin America. In most part of the world, including Latin America, the military was usually under the control of civilian government whether it’s a democratic party, authoritarian regime or monarchy. Military is just another bureaucratic branch of the state. By the time they took over the office, they did not necessarily have an ideology to justify their coup d’état or to convince their fellow members why they have to remain in office or politics at all, let alone mobilising the public with an ideology.

However, the evolution of the military in Southeast Asia took a different path because of the movements for the independence. The military emerged before the independent state. In

fact, the militaries were initiated or founded by the people who are politically motivated to fight against the colonial power. For instance, in Myanmar, the “Thirty Comrades” – known as the founders of modern military – was mainly composed of young politicians who have been mobilizing for independence by other means.

Due to these movements, in post-independence era, the military remains to be a politically important institution. In most Southeast Asian countries, the military and politics intertwined very closely and the senior-level officers in military are also public figures who earned the respect and admiration from the general public. General Aung Sun who founded the Myanmar’s military is also regarded as founding father of modern Myanmar as well. Not only the independent movement gave the military an unusual place in politics, it is also the origin of the ideology which later will help Myanmar’s military regime to convince its member why they have to stay in office and politics.

6.2 Military as the centre of the state or the state

Under military regime of Myanmar, there was no distinction between the words “state” and “regime”. Furthermore, the word “regime” in Myanmar can have two different meanings: “government” (အစိုးရ) and “regime”. Under the military regime, both the officials from government and state media used the word “နိုင်ငံတော် အစိုးရ” which can be loosely translated into “state government”. The meaning of this word is that the state and the regime is inseparable and the military regime itself is the state. In state media, when the describe the achievement or actions of the military, the usually used the word “နိုင်ငံတော်အစိုးရ”, state government instead of military or military government.

The attempt to merge the military and the state went beyond the use of the terms and names. On the newspaper and the billboards around the country, military regime produced

slogans that suggests that the military is the centre of the state and the most important institution in the country. Some slogans are

- *Only the Tatmadaw is the mother, only the Tatmadaw is the father*²⁴
- *When the Tatmadaw is strong will the nation be strong*²⁵

The military regime also tried to associate the Tatmadaw with the ancient kingdoms of Myanmar. In the textbooks for primary and secondary schools, the history class depicts how the capability of the successive Kings and their army build the ancient Kingdoms and conquer the lands. They associate those kings and their armies as the predecessor of current day Tatmadaw. The name “Tatmadaw” itself means royal force and that name is adopted from the army in the ancient kingdom. The statues of Anawyahtar, Bayinnaung, and Alaungpaya, the founders of first, second and third kingdom of Myanmar respectively are erected in front of all the training academy of military and, in some cities. The senior officials usually refers those kings as not only the founder of kingdom but also the founder of the army as well. In his autobiography, Khin Nyunt, former general and prime minister wrote,

“Although it is said that King Anawyahtar founded the first kingdom of Myanmar using his power and authority (in a supernatural sense), he had his fellow hero soldiers. Without hero soldiers like Kyansitthar, Nahtweyuu, Ngalonelaphwe and Nyungoophee, it will be difficult to build the Union in unity. It is significant in the history of Myanmar that, it is with the participation and works of talented and truthful comrades and soldiers, both King Bayinnaung, the founder of second kingdom of Myanmar and King Alaungpaya, the founder of third kingdom of Myanmar, build the great country of Myanmar”. (Khin Nyunt 2013, 125)

²⁴ တပ်မတော်သာ အမိ၊ တပ်မတော်သာ အဖ

²⁵ တပ်မတော်အင်အားရှိမှ တိုင်းပြည်အင်အားရှိမည်

Throughout their regime, they depicted the military as the natural and historical element of Myanmar while democracy is the foreign concept that have the potential to destabilize the country and it is only Tatmadaw who can maintain the stability in the country. In his speech for the 2008 graduation of Defence Services Academy in Pyin Oo Lwin, Than Shwe, Senior General then, said

“Multi-party democracy can both be medicine and poison based on how you use and it is very deep and broad. The market economy is also a trade with the capital and, without experience, we just be exploited by others. That’s why military government, together with the people, is building the basic needs and, at the same time, realising the 7-step roadmap..... Only then the country will be free from dangers and the democracy will be stable”.

This speech was just seven months the 2008 constitution was legalized by the referendum and nearly 3 years before 2010 election. Even in the speeches and statements before the 7-step road map was adopted, military regime did not oppose (officially) to the idea of the democracy. However, implying the democracy has seed for chaos and lack of discipline, they coined a new term “discipline democracy” and used it consistently. Since the beginning, a promise to transfer the office was made. According to the military, the transfer of power and democratic transition can be made only when the military has built the country into a stable one and the transfer should be done with the guidance of military. In 2008 constitution, *“enabling the Defence Service to be able to participate in the National political leadership role of the state”* is one of the basic principle.

For them, Tatmadaw is entitled to remain at the centre of the political arena and it is unthinkable to have a political system without the role of military. In the same speech, he said *“Tatmadaw is doing the task that will be difficult for the government elected by the people’s vote in the future and it proved the true willingness to Tatmadaw to build a good country”.*

For most members of Tatmadaw, as it is Tatmadaw who was mainly responsible for the independence, without Tatmadaw, Myanmar will not exist.*(to be confirmed again by interview). Consequently, those who are opposed to the Tatmadaw remaining in office are perceived as the traitor to the country. The slogans to remind this concept were also spread throughout the country as well.

- *Tatmadaw and the people cooperate and crush all those harming the Union*²⁶
- *Tatmadaw and the people in eternal unity anyone attempting to divide them is our enemy.*²⁷

The institutionalisation of this idea can be found in the training of the officers, text books and state media. After institutionalising and using the terms in ambiguous ways, there is no longer distinction between state, regime and military and all the terms became interrelated. This not only let the military to justify their stay in office but also become a debate of terms after democratic transitions in 2011. In the negotiation for peace process, what the word “state” mean in Myanmar became a highly heated debate.

6.3 Military as the preserver of the Union

By leading the independent movement, the military, by default, became the stake holder in shaping the countries in Southeast Asia including Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia (and, in a slightly different way, Thailand). In Myanmar, addition to the common experience of countries in the region, faced other security challenges after the independence. The first challenge came from the EAOs that I mentioned in the previous chapters. Given the fact that SLORC is the first government ever to be able to enter the cease-fire agreement, they claimed that they are the only one who can guarantee for the peace.

²⁶ တပ်နှင့်ပြည်သူ လက်တွဲကာ၊ ပြည်ထောင်စုဖွဲ့သူမှန်သမျှ ချေမှုန်းကြ။

²⁷ တပ်နှင့်ပြည်သူ မြဲကြည်ဖြူ။ သွေးခွဲလာသူ ဒို့ရန်သူ

Another security challenge came from the Kuomintang intervention in 1950s and 1960s. When the communist party, in China, seized the power in October 1949, KMT troops led by Chiang Kai-shek started basing in the border area between China and Myanmar. Because of geographical positions covered with mountains and jungles, the border area was difficult to control for both governments. It was more difficult to control as some northern and eastern parts of the borders were occupied by the EAOs. By, 1953, Kantung, Manglung and Kokang regions – parts of Shan states – were already under KMT. the tensions between KMT and Myanmar government reached to its peak in 1960s. The military operation in first years of 1960s ended the occupation of parts of Shan state by KMT troops. (Taylor 1973)

Using these historical backgrounds, military regime built two most fundamental elements of their ideology. First, being composed by various ethnic groups, Myanmar constantly faces the danger of disintegration. Second, the foreign powerful countries are always trying to interfere the domestic affairs of Myanmar which can lead to the disintegration of Myanmar.

Military regime dismissed the history that the ethnic groups in Myanmar were never in a country all together before 1948. According to military regime, the unity was always achieved and the idea of today Myanmar existed since the beginning of the history. The official definition of the Union Spirit²⁸ is “*the willingness to live together peacefully and friendly among the ethnic brothers and sister who live on the same land, who drink the same water and who are born from the same womb*”. Slogans such as “*Only union spirit is the true patriotism all the ethnicities will have to safeguard*” were used as well. Together with the notion, the right of secession – guaranteed in the 1947 constitution – was dismissed by the military regime as well.

²⁸ Also known as spirit of Panglong

The leaders of Tatmadaw claimed that the disagreement among the ethnic groups emerged only because of the colonial legacy. Furthermore, they also claimed that the foreign countries are trying to divide among ethnic lines which can lead to the disintegration of the Union. In 2006 commencement speech at DSA, Than Shwe said that

“Colonial expansionists can no longer ignore the capacity of Tatmadaw and they had to let go of our country. However, as the saying “putting sand in the meat you can’t eat”²⁹, they made sure the disunity among our ethnic groups which resulted in the stream of blood.

Comrades,

If you look back at the history, you will see that unity among ethnic groups is fundamental to the national politics and the disintegration of the Union will result in losing the sovereignty”

Military regime conflated the concept to prevent from the disintegration of the Union as national interest. They officially announced the three national causes; 1) non-disintegration of the Union, 2) non-disintegration of national sovereignty (among the ethnic groups), 3) perpetuation of the sovereignty. The adoption of these three national causes were highly mediated. It was showed in the beginning of all released movies, music videos and songs. The billboards were erected in most of the basic education schools and universities. They featured in the newspaper daily and national televisions emitted three causes in-between programs as well. That mediation still continues at the time of writing this thesis.

These three national causes are also the official objectives of the military. In this way, Tatmadaw conflated their objectives and corporate interests to the national interest.

Military regime also made the propaganda for the foreign interference and even foreign intervention as well. For this, military doctrines of Tatmadaw need to be examined. Although

²⁹ It is a Burmese proverb which means destroying something one cannot have.

military doctrines are mainly the technical guidelines for troops, the doctrines of Tatmadaw explains how they perceived the foreign threats and how other sectors, besides security, are included in the doctrines.

Maung Aung Myoe (2009) explained that the Tatmadaw had adopted three different doctrines since 1948:

First doctrine (1948-1958)

Second doctrine – People’s War (1958-1988)

Third doctrine – People’s War under modernisation (1988-present)

The first decade after independence was when the civil war was most heated. Surprisingly, Tatmadaw, at that time, didn’t have the strategy for internal insurgency. The first military doctrine was not very well developed, and it was heavily emphasized on the case of foreign invasion.

The second phase of military doctrine started in 1958 with the 124-page report of then Colonel Kyi Win. In the report, for the first time, the counter-insurgency strategy was introduced but counter-foreign invasion strategy was still another main element of the doctrine. In 1964, the word “*People’s War*” was introduced. “*A “people’s war” is generally defined in Myanmar as a just war to achieve victory of the entire people through the five (military) columns....*”(Maung Aung Myoe 2009, 27). The five military columns (စစ်ကြောင်းကြီးငါးကြောင်း) is another important core of the ‘people’s war’. The five columns

are politics, society, economy, defence, public management. It is evident that Tatmadaw considered the areas such as politics and economy as one way of military techniques and believed that they are entitled to handle those affairs. The five columns were not a classified information and it was informed to all members of Tatmadaw. The second phase was fully

developed in the after 1964 under Ne Win's military regime (1962-1974). It was well before 1988 coup d'état that will produce two-decade long military regime.

In 1988, the third phase of military doctrine emerged. The only new element of new doctrine was the modernisation, i.e. to make the military more capable and modern. By 1990, there is no longer major border dispute with none of the neighbour. Under Ne Win's isolation policy, Myanmar had very few contacts with international community. There was no potential foreign invasion. However, counter-foreign invasion is still part of the military doctrine. The speeches and statement about possible foreign invasions. Military regime regarded Thailand, a traditional rival who is close with the west, as the potential enemy. A new additional textbook that solely focus on the historical relation between Thailand and Myanmar was introduced to middle schools in late 1990s. In that textbook, it was said that Thailand is trying to invade Shan state as Thai and Shan have closed ethnic, linguistic and cultural ties.

The SLORC also introduced the political, social and economic objectives (which are three of five military columns excluding defence³⁰ and public management) and they also appeared on the newspaper daily till 2011. These objectives, together with five military columns, served as a brief party manifesto.

Table 7. Political, economic, social objectives under SPDC

Four political objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability of the state, community peace and tranquillity, prevalence of law and order • National reconciliation • Emergency of a new enduring state constitution • Building of a new modern developed nation in accord with the new State constitution
Four economic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of agriculture as the base and all-round development of other sectors of the economy as well • Proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system • Development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources from sources inside the country and abroad

³⁰ Three national causes are considered as objectives of Tatmadaw and can also considered as security/defence objectives as well. Thus, only public management from five military columns were excluded.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The initiative to shape the national economy must be kept in the hands of the state and national peoples
Four social objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uplift of the morale and morality of the entire nation • Uplift of national prestige and integrity and preservation and safeguarding of culture heritage and national character • Uplift of dynamism of patriotic spirit • Uplift of health, fitness and education standards of the entire nation
Source: News light of Myanmar	

Alongside with objectives and three national causes, “People’s Desire” were published and they were equally mediatised as three national causes.

Table 8. *People's Desire, a slogan of SPDC*

People’s Desire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oppose those relying on external elements, acting as stooges, holding negative views • Oppose those trying to jeopardize stability of the State and progress of the nation. • Oppose foreign nations interfering internal affairs of the State • Crush all internal and external destructive elements as the common enemy.
Source: News light of Myanmar	

6.4 Ideology of Myanmar’s military regime

To sum up, the goal in the ideology of the military regime was the non-disintegration of the Union. However, there’s always a possibility of the disintegration. The only way to guarantee the non-disintegration is with the guidance and involvement of Tatmadaw in the politics. Tatmadaw is the best institution to handle the instability and it is entitled to be in politics because it was part of even ancient kingdoms of Myanmar and, without Tatmadaw, Myanmar would not have existed.

Myanmar’s military regime did not invent this ideology from the scratch. The history of Myanmar and the way Tatmadaw was created presented an opportunity for the military regime

to develop an ideology – that other military regime outside Southeast Asia could not enjoy – and they took the opportunity and develop an ideology to convince their members of Tatmadaw and public.

Conclusion

Unlike other military regime with short lifespan, the military regime in Myanmar survived more than two decades. In this thesis, I presented the explanation why they could survive against the odds. My argument, in a nutshell, is that their longevity in the office is because they could adopt the functions of a one-party authoritarian regimes.

Myanmar's military regime did not establish the party institutions. However, they could adopt all the functions of a one-party regimes that made the one-party regimes more durable than the military regimes. First, they could make a credible power-sharing arrangement by defining the power spheres among elites, by eliminating the uncertainty and by making the elites invested in the regime. Second, the spoils of the office are distributed to the members of military as well as to the EAOs. Despite the absence of the party, they could build a base of the loyalists. Third, the military regime could build a political ideology to justify why they need to be the office while other military regimes used only a foundational myth for their legitimation.

In 2011, the military regime was ended when they transferred the power to the civilian government emerged from 2010 election. This thesis did not include why the military regime finally decide to gave up the power for two reasons. First, the main purpose of the thesis was to explain the longevity. Second, the limitation of time and resources did not let me explore that area. However, I believe that my three explanations for the longevity of military can pave the way for the future exploration.

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