

General Assembly: Special Political and Decolonization CIMUN

Topic 2: Intervening in coup d'état in Myanmar

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Introduction

In 1962, Myanmar came under military power. 2011 saw a short period of a regime in Myanmar resembling a democracy which involved the implementation of many reforms including parliamentary elections. The military shared power with the civilian government since the elections in 2015 but was never under the control of elected officials. On February 1st, 2021, military leaders took over Myanmar in a coup d'état, an action that led to widespread internal protest and international outrage. The subsequent crackdown on dissidents and former democratically elected civilian leaders has resulted in deadly violence. This research report will explain the situation and difficulties in Myanmar, point delegates to relevant UN resolutions, and suggest possible solutions. Along with individual research, delegates should use this information to propose new and different solutions to an increasingly complex issue.

Key Terms

Coup d'état: the sudden action of overthrowing or altering the current governing body through force and often violence. A military coup is when military personnel seize power.

Tatmadaw: the name of the Myanmar military. It has never been under the control of the civilian government.

Background Information

On November 8, 2020, Myanmar held parliamentary elections in which the most prominent civilian party, the National League for Democracy, won 83% of the seats up for election. This was seen to be a testament of the popularity of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi who is the leader of the biggest party and has been the state councilor (effectively president of the country, although the Constitution guarantees that position to a military figure) since she was voted into office in 2016, the first fully democratic election in Myanmar for decades.

Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi is a somewhat controversial figure after she defended the country's deadly campaign against a minority Muslim ethnic group, the Rohingya. (The military has also led campaigns against other ethnic minority groups such as the Shan and the Kokang.) In 2019, she represented Myanmar in the International Court of Justice against the charge of ethnic cleansing. Others considered it a practical move in order to speed up the process of full democracy in cooperation with the military. This claim is questionable as recent events have called into question how much the Tatmadaw values democracy.

The military refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the election and unsuccessfully contested the results in Myanmar's Supreme Court, claiming the vote was fraudulent. This came after the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which had the military's support, did poorly in the polls. They then hinted at a military coup before seeming to back-track, claiming what they said was misinterpreted.

The coup d'état began with the military arresting and taking into custody the National League for Democracy leaders and a number of civilian officials. Some of these were Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, President U Win Myint, chief ministers for several areas, and cabinet ministers. The Vice President Myint Swe, a former general, was appointed as acting president.

The 2008 Constitution, which was written by the military to guarantee them significant power over the country, allows the military to declare a state of emergency for Myanmar which they gave notice of over the military-run Myawaddy television station. The state of emergency declared in February 2021 will last a year.

The military thereafter inhibited communication and travel in Myanmar by cutting off much of the country's broadcast media and internet and telephone access. Domestic and international flights were called off, and commercial banks and the stock market were shut. Residents of Yangon, the largest city in the country, ran markets in order to supply food and other necessities.

One result of the coup has been extensive protests which, for several weeks, were, on the whole, peaceful. However, on the 20th of February, two unarmed civilians were killed by security forces in Mandalay during a demonstration. Two days later, millions of people in Myanmar took part in a general strike.

By the time the protests had been going on for two months, the military became much more brutal in its response. Notably, the military reacted similarly to democracy movements in 1988 and 2007. The death toll is in the hundreds and still climbing. A significant number of the dead were under 30 or including children. Many thousands more have been injured, arrested, taken into custody, or tortured.

This has encouraged many protesters to take up arms and become almost a guerrilla force. Daring and extreme action such as this seems to signify a kind of desperation amongst pro-democracy activists. There is a degree of disagreement between protesters as to what will be most effective, with an increasing number of people believing the military must be combated with its own techniques. In more remote areas of the country, people are training to use basic warfare strategies, firearms, hand grenades, and home-made smoke bombs. The overthrown

parliament, still believing themselves to be the rightful government, has called for a "revolution" and the creation of a federal army.

Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi and Mr. Win Myint currently face legally questionable secret trials which started on the 16th of February. Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi has been charged with breaching import restrictions after foreign communication equipment was found in her villa compound, and Mr. Win Myint was accused of violating natural disaster restrictions. They face six and three years respectively in prison for these obscure charges. Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi has been denied legal representation, and her lawyer was not informed that the trial had started. Some believe the trial, which could last as long as a year, is just an excuse to keep Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi in detention.

Power over the country was given by the military to the army chief, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing. He would have been obligated to retire from his position in the summer of 2021 due to age which could have jeopardized his other interests. The military coup has allowed him to continue in a position of power. He has now seized control over the borders and police.

The military has promised to overhaul the election commission which rejected its claims of rampant voter fraud. They will then hold another election and restore the rightful winner to power. No details of this have been released.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Association of Southeast Asian Nations: ASEAN has called for the end of violence perpetrated by the Tatmadaw and the restoration of peace and stability in Myanmar. They have also offered to facilitate and mediate talks between the conflicting parties in Myanmar so that a solution that satisfies both sides to some degree can be reached. ASEAN has also volunteered to give humanitarian aid. It is important to note that this group is generally laissez-faire concerning the internal affairs of member states, and so cannot do much.

United States: The Biden administration has pledged to make the upholding of human rights an international priority. As such, they quickly condemned the military for its violence against protesters and announced sanctions in late March which named specific military leaders and other groups involved in the coup. They denied the Myanmar government more than \$40 million in aid and instead gave it to civilian society.

European Union: The EU joined the US and the UK in denouncing the Tatmadaw and imposing sanctions. Both have demanded the release of Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi.

China: China is one of Myanmar's biggest investors, so it is in the interests of both countries to maintain good relations. They have been hesitant in making any firm responses because China is on friendly terms with both Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi and the military that currently has her in custody. Instead, they have expressed a desire for social and political stability. It is important to note that they have not given the Tatmadaw generals any reassurance of their support should they need to defend themselves in the UN.

The UK, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Japan, and India, amongst other countries, have all expressed outrage at the actions of the military and are demanding the release of all those in custody of the military.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Reports

<https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/46/21>

Human Rights Council - adopted on 24 March, 2021

<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/287>

General Assembly - adopted on 18 June, 2021

Possible Solutions

The UN resolution passed on the 18th of June has called for a cessation of selling arms to Myanmar by all nations. The resolution has also called for the immediate release of all the democratic leaders being illegally detained by the military and the end of violence towards protesters.

In order to intimidate Myanmar's military leaders into backing down and conceding to the demands of the democracy protesters, it is believed that the international response must be one of universal outrage and sanctions while endeavoring to protect protesters and civilians from further harm.

Sanctions must be imposed with care. In 2010, the US and the EU, amongst others, imposed sanctions which, through poor financial management by the government, adversely affected the civilian population, rather than the government. The sanctions had no influence over the implementation of democratic elections in 2011. At the least, they will serve as an indication to the Tatmadaw and any other military leaders considering a coup that such actions are not and will not be tolerated by the other nations. Targeted sanctions, such as those imposed by the US,

are best because they ensure the individuals affected are those responsible for the human rights abuses.

Delegates should focus efforts on humanitarian relief, keeping in mind that many thousands of innocent civilians are at the mercy of the military, who clearly have no reservations in turning violent and even deadly. What happens if and when the military coup ends is another issue to be considered, as the power sharing between the military and civilian government was clearly flawed. Issues over the extensive human rights abuses and what actions countries should take to punish and prevent the military from further atrocities must be addressed, as well.

Helpful Resources for Delegates

Obviously this is a rapidly changing situation, and there will have been developments since this was written. Delegates should be sure to keep an eye on the news about the coup d'état.

Amnesty International - Myanmar

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/asia-and-the-pacific/myanmar/>

Myanmar NOW

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