

SUBVERT BURMA'S ELECTION!

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Introduction

Two weeks ago, hundreds of thousands of Cambodians demonstrated in Phnom Penh. They were protesting last July's national ballot, which was fraudulent - rigged to keep Hun Sen, the dictator of the country since 1985, in power. The Cambodians want a new, free and fair election.

Hun Sen has now launched a crackdown, and a number of protestors have been murdered.

Next door to Cambodia, hundreds of thousands of Thais are also demonstrating, demanding that an election that is set for February 2nd not take place. They know that this election too will be fraudulent, and designed to enable the dictator of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra, to retain power through his sister Yingluck and other proxies.

What these two situations show, and what the Thais have finally realized, is that it is better to prevent fraud rather than allow it to take place and then have to reverse it. Simply holding an election, even if the evidence of vote buying and other types of illegal activities is overwhelming, creates an air of legitimacy that the regime and its allies, both political and media, can then exploit. Congratulations to the Thais for no longer accepting the travesty of being ruled from abroad by a common criminal!

An election is also planned for Burma, for 2015. This election, as with the last general election in 2010, is guaranteed to be fraudulent as well, and in many different ways. Burma's military dictators have no intention whatsoever to relinquish power. The people of the country therefore need to organize their own overwhelming protest, to guarantee that the ballot is not held.

Than Shwe's strategy

What the election signifies is that we are now approaching the final stages of Senior General Than Shwe's strategy. It is essential that the people understand his plan, to have the best chance to defeat it. In effect, there is a decisive game of chess underway in the country, and the regime is plotting its moves well in advance. The people need to be aware of these moves, to position themselves accordingly, so they can win the game, meaning: their freedom.

Than Shwe's overall approach is what is known as pacification. He has many different opponents among the people of Burma and their allies, and he needs to confront them all, so they end their resistance and are pacified. He has applied this tactic with various steps directed at the

International Community; Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy; other activists including 88 Generation; the ethnic nationalities; and the general public.

The International Community

Than Shwe's no fool. He understands human nature pretty well. He knows that people, and their governments and leaders, are selfish, and that they will rarely take risks for themselves, much less others. Burma is an inherently wealthy nation, both in natural and human resources, and the corporations of the world, and the national governments that they control, covet this wealth. It has been easy for the companies to get national officials to back a pro-appeasement and economic development policy. Victims of the regime have rarely been shown on TV, and in any case it is not only Burma that's corrupt. The whole world is corrupt.

There was never any significant foreign support for the people of Burma, much less an intervention. The only thing that the people have received is a lot of useless "diplomatic concern."

Then, with the simplest of lies - *we've taken off our uniforms and are now for "reform"* - coupled with playing China against the West for the spoils of Burma's corporate piracy, Than Shwe was able to end this "only for show" support. The one international bulwark in any case had been the United States, and he effectively turned its latest President, Barack Obama, into his co-conspirator. With Obama facing an economic crisis in America, and a Republican opposition that was overtly obstructionist, it was clear that foreign affairs would be downplayed in his Administration. Coupled with his lack of experience in international affairs, and also his desire for a foreign policy "victory," the stage was set to accept the regime's lie. He and Secretary of State Clinton embraced the charade, dropped the economic sanctions, and the Burma Gold Rush began. For the United States under this President, the regime's continuing gross human rights violations against the Kachin, the Rohingya, other ethnic groups, and the overall public, are only something to ignore.

Aung San Suu Kyi

The greatest gift from the International Community to Burma's military dictators, though, was the Nobel Peace Prize for Aung San Suu Kyi. First, this established her as Burma's "pro-democracy" leader, which she in no way deserved merely through being General Aung San's daughter. In 1989, Burma had other pro-democracy champions, some with years of opposition experience and knowledge. Singling her out actually damaged the movement, and in many ways. First, she became its ideological leader, for which position she was ill-suited. But, it is not only her true believer pacifism that is out of place for a pro-democracy movement (social change simply doesn't work that way). Rather, there is the fact that her personal history led her to feel a sense of entitlement and privilege, which apparently merged with an innate authoritarian streak. She then proceeded to dominate the NLD as a vassal, and her influence over the organization continues to reign supreme. Her elitism further led her to endorse the pro-appeasement entreaties

of the U.S. and Europe. Finally, having been anointed with the Prize, it was simple for Than Shwe to suppress the overall movement, just by keeping her under house arrest.

Indeed, I believe that she is the greatest practical barrier - even more than the regime's guns - that the real pro-democracy movement of Burma has to confront.

The events of last month are also noteworthy. In mid-December, Suu Kyi announced that the NLD would boycott the 2015 election "if she couldn't run for President." Then, ten days later she abruptly reversed this position, saying that the NLD would participate even without a constitutional amendment permitting her to run. Then, three days after that, one of Than Shwe's proxies, the USDP, said that it would support an amendment allowing her to contest the top office.

Two things are important about this amazing series of developments. First, a behind the scenes deal clearly was struck. I wouldn't be surprised if U.S. Ambassador Mitchell played a key shuttle diplomacy role, brokering the arrangement between Suu Kyi and the regime.

Of more significance, though, is what the deal says about her view of her own importance. Frankly, she is irrelevant to the future of Burma. SHE is not BURMA. The country will be around long after she is gone.

The Constitution is fundamentally undemocratic, starting with its implicit racism towards the ethnic nationalities; and through how it grants the military a superior position to the people including with a free hand to launch a coup. It needs to be trashed and a new Constitution written. Amendment will never be enough.

However, Suu Kyi doesn't care about this. The only thing that is important to her is her lust to be President. She is confusing the two: What Burma needs with what she wants. Moreover, by reversing the threat of an NLD boycott so soon, it will be difficult to reimpose it as a reaction to future regime actions, such as on the national census. An intelligent leader, not obsessed with her own role, would have maintained this threat right up until the election date.

In summary, Suu Kyi is not only pacified, she is doing everything she can, both consciously and subconsciously, to help the dictatorship perpetuate its power. From house arrest prisoner, she has become Than Shwe's chess queen.

88 Generation and other internal activists

The next major resistance group is the brave band of individuals, now organized as 88 Generation Students, who sacrificed years of their lives in prison on behalf of the democratic struggle. Unfortunately, it appears that they have been pacified as well, although nowhere near to the extent as has happened with Suu Kyi. There are a couple of factors at work here. First, they can be re-imprisoned at any time under the terms of their release, which threat they have to take

seriously. Secondly, they too are devoted to “The Lady,” and have repeatedly deferred to her. And thirdly, some individuals - such as Ko Ko Gyi - have been skillfully manipulated by the regime through plays on their own personal streaks of anti-Muslim racism. As a result, at least until yesterday’s very welcome protest in Rangoon against the regime’s oppression (although they did apply for a permit for it), 88 Generation has been quiet.

Other individuals and groups, though, have not been so quiet. They have retained their dedication to the greater cause of freedom and democracy for Burma, as well as associated issues such as the land thefts and the attacks against the ethnic nationalities, including the Rohingya. Unfortunately, they are all being held back by Suu Kyi’s imperial sense of self-worth, and which brainwashing the majority of the Burmans of the country still seem to accept.

The ethnic nationalities

On the other hand, the ethnic nationality armed resistance groups are far from pacified. Even the groups that have agreed to ceasefires retain the ability to return to armed conflict at any time. Indeed, for some groups such as the Wa, the ceasefires actually enshrined their autonomous status. The Wa are independent now, not even part of Burma. If the regime ever does try to attack them, to bring them “back into the legal-fold,” they will put up one hell of a fight.

Some groups are wavering, though, including the KNU and the SSA-S. The regime is pushing for a nationwide ceasefire, and unilateral disarmament, which to it is the most broad-based form of ethnic pacification that it can hope to achieve. Yawd Serk of the SSA-S has already expressed a willingness to sign (although not to disarm), and the new leaders of the KNU - who also obtained their positions through a fraudulent election - would no doubt do so as well, were it not for strong resistance from the Karen people. The overall situation with the ethnic groups is therefore unresolved, but their un-pacification will hopefully remain intact for the foreseeable future.

The general public

Finally, the general public of Burma is pacified as well. By being beaten down by the regime through abuse and enforced poverty for the last fifty years, and through being misled by their supposed pro-democracy leaders over the last twenty-five, they have lost the will to rise up. What is ironic is that if any country deserves a massive protest in the streets, it is Burma, even more so than Cambodia and Thailand. This leaves open the question if there is anything that will get the people going again: get them to realize that as with all human societies ultimate power lies with them, not with their autocrats - or even soldiers with guns.

So, to return to Than Shwe’s plan, he wants to complete the pacification program with a nationwide ceasefire; then refuse to amend the Constitution, or allow only a minor modification such that his ally and apologist Suu Kyi can assume her so-desired figurehead status; then follow this with a fraudulent census that undercounts ethnic nationality populations; then conduct a

fraudulent election that paves the way for a succession of future dictators, all to the end of following the model that is working so well in China.

Nationwide ceasefire

As I've written before, and with this new perspective, it is essential that the armed ethnic groups not agree to a nationwide ceasefire. If they do, the overall pro-democracy resistance in Burma will fail and Than Shwe's plan will succeed. The only exception to not signing would be if the regime agrees to the ethnic positions, including to stop Burma Army attacks; to withdraw from ethnic area bases; to cease its abuse of ethnic villagers; to allow equality and self-determination; and to agree to an entirely new constitution that enshrines all of this in a federal, democratic structure.

Of course, there is no chance at all that the regime will accept this. Therefore, there should never be a nationwide ceasefire. If corrupt ethnic leaders do decide to sign such a ceasefire, the people, starting with the rank and file resistance soldiers, should renew their struggle.

One thing to understand about Burma's chess game is that it is presently very finely balanced. While Than Shwe may control the country, and have the backing of the International Community and Suu Kyi, he cannot force his plan through. He needs the ethnic groups to surrender.

This in turn means that the ethnic groups have the upper hand. They do not have to sign a nationwide ceasefire - ever! Until the KNU election fiasco, they had actually been defeating the Burma Army on many fronts, inflicting staggering regime losses from Karen State all the way up to Putao. Tatmadaw morale was terrible and its officer unity was eroding. The possibility of a soldier led pro-democracy coup was clearly on the rise. (Hence the "reform" and the 2010 election.) Further, there was an opportunity for the resistance to unify and establish its own Federal Army, take the fight to the generals, and free the country outright. The actions of General Mutu and his cohort were therefore not just a betrayal of the Karen; they were a treasonous act against the entire country.

The secret meeting between Mutu and the top dictators last weekend is further evidence of his treachery. It seems that like Suu Kyi he is now attempting to strike his own deal.

Also, failure to sign a nationwide ceasefire does not only mean that the ethnic nationalities will remain un-pacified. It puts the balance of Than Shwe's plan in jeopardy as well. For the census to have even an appearance of legitimacy, there must be an attempt to count the public in the ethnic areas. However, without a ceasefire this count cannot take place. Therefore, a legitimate national election itself can never be held (witness how the 2010 election did not cover Kachin and other ethnic areas.)

The ethnic groups do not only have the better chess pieces relative to the ceasefire, they have a strong enough position to defeat Than Shwe's entire plan! They must ensure that their corrupt leaders do not throw this advantage away.

The 2014 census

Even without a ceasefire, though, we should expect the March census to go ahead. With the similarly pro-regime United Nations running it, not only will it not be abandoned, the result - no matter how flawed - will be touted as genuine.

There will be many avenues for regime-perpetrated fraud, to undercount the ethnic peoples, and to overcount the Burmans. This will occur even in the face of ethnic attempts to prevent it. Monitors cannot be present in every village.

It's clear that the regime intends both to undercount the ethnic population, and to fragment it. A declaration of pure Burmans not only as the largest group, but as a clear majority, is the objective.

The regime is continuing its 135 national races mythology. The acceptable ethnic group designations will not even be published until a month before the actual census, and reportedly mixed-group individuals will not be allowed to so identify. As in the past, it is inevitable that villagers will be intimidated to identify as Burman if they are Buddhist. Now, they will also be forced to register as Burman if they are mixed group.

In addition, there will be no counts of the millions of refugees, IDPs and migrant workers, all of which will work to the regime's advantage as well.

2015 election

Finally, and given a nationwide ceasefire and the census as the groundwork, Than Shwe will permit the holding of an election. It's a waste of time at this point to anticipate the many different ways in which this would be rigged. There was excellent documentation of the widespread techniques that were used in 2010, and we can no doubt expect a repeat of all of these. Personally, while the Constitution might be amended to allow Suu Kyi to run for President, I still view this as unlikely. Than Shwe's intention to have Min Aung Hlaing serve as Thein Sein's successor has already been signaled. The old man is aware that he needs to start looking beyond his remaining years, and set up a self-perpetuating cycle of "elected" dictators - at least until his grandson comes of age.

In conclusion, we are now approaching a turning point for Burma. The next two years will unquestionably be historic. Than Shwe will either succeed, or he will fail. The people of the country will lose, or they will win. Burma's chess game is coming to its close. This is what is at stake.

It is essential that an election in the country not be held, until it can be free and fair and absolutely transparent. Therefore, the ethnic groups should not agree to a nationwide ceasefire.

Instead, they should reinvigorate their resistance. And, the people should not participate in the census. Instead, they should oppose it. It is time for everyone in Burma to stand up for themselves and for what is right, and to oppose their dictators and false idols.