

THE CRITICAL PATH FOR BURMA

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The optimistic view that Burma is now on the path to democracy is broadcast every day. We see it in story after story from print and television journalists (even from the “free” Burma media); in statements from a few NGOs (such as the International Crisis Group, which seems inordinately able to ignore crises!); and from diplomats who are invested in the view that the generals of the country’s dictatorship are allowing “real” change.

It remains to be seen, though, if this view is well-founded. While I generally don’t like to fault optimism - having hope is humanity’s most basic positive trait - given the regime’s continuing atrocities and lesser crimes, hope for Burma now appears to be reckless if not dangerous.

My view of the country’s democratic change is that it is not real - or at a minimum not complete - if it does not lead to the political conditions that exist in established democracies such as Norway, Australia, South Korea, and Japan. The people of Burma must have real and enduring peace, and freedom of speech and association. Also, the country needs powerful defenses against corruption, as this is the only way to ensure that national development is carried out in their best interests alone, so they can finally escape their appalling poverty, and have the foundation in place to build a fair and prosperous future.

I understand that this is a lot to ask, but nothing else will do.

Perhaps the most important criticism that I would level at the individuals, institutions and journalists who now “hope,” is that they appear to be willing to settle for less: A lot less.

They are failing the people of Burma, and they do not have this right. If they persist, then just as the Burma Army is the enemy of the ethnic nationalities, so too are they the enemy of the people.

1. THE CRITICAL PATH

Burma is a very, very, long way from freedom and democracy, but the course that needs to be taken is not ambiguous. There is a clear critical path, every step of which is absolutely necessary:

1. Successful resistance against the regime’s many different abuses of the people, so that the abuses end.
2. A nationwide ceasefire, followed by the drawback of regime troops from ethnic nationality areas.

3. Drafting of a new Constitution: To create functioning systems of separation of powers and checks and balances, including through assigning the military its appropriate role; and to establish a federal structure, to provide constitutional protections to all of Burma's many different peoples.
4. Conducting a fair census, to determine the country's real population and the numbers of its different groups, and also the mixed group population.
5. Registering of political parties for all of these different groups, and other interest blocks (e.g., Greens - environmentalists).
6. Conducting of a free and fair general election, followed by the formation of a truly democratic government.
7. A complete revamping of Burma's legal system, including the annulment of existing law, drafting and passage of new law, formation of new courts, and election or appointment of new judges.
8. The prosecution of regime officials, soldiers and police for the crimes that they have committed.
9. Alternatively (and I would say preferably), overthrowing the regime now, with a popular uprising together with military action by pro-democracy forces, backed with international assistance (as was given to Libya and is now being provided to Syria), thereby ending the abuse immediately, and then continuing with a constitutional convention.

One by one

I will consider each of these steps in turn. In addition, I will postpone the review of the regime's abuses, and resistance against them, until the second part of the article, with two exceptions.

Right now, Burma's regime is committing the crime against humanity of ethnic cleansing, against the Rohingya people, and war crimes against the Kachin.

These issues are so critical that they overshadow everything else that is happening in the country. They are really the only issues that should be discussed. There must be opposition from all quarters, even those who have pinned everything on hope (or what can more accurately be termed, blind faith).

The ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya people

There is a lamentable record of genocide for the human species. There are many, many examples in historical accounts, and unquestionably countless cases in pre-history as well.

Genocide is the targeting of a particular ethnic group, for extermination. In the last century some of the more well-known examples included of Armenians by the Turks, Jews by Germany's Nazis, and Tutsis in Rwanda by the Hutu. A legal case has also been prepared that in Burma in recent decades the military dictatorship attempted genocide against a number of ethnic nationalities, including the Shan, Karenni, and Karen.

One would have hoped that this sordid chapter in Burma's history, which also includes the well-documented genocides by Burman kings against the Mon and Arakan peoples in the 18th century, would have ended with the new "reform." Unfortunately, it has not.

There is clear evidence that starting in 2012 ethnic cleansing has been conducted by Rakhine people against the Rohingya, with instigation and armed participation by regime agents and personnel. Given the widespread hateful sentiments expressed against the Rohingya in public, by Rakhine nationalists, Burman nationalists, Buddhist monks, "pro-democracy" activists, and even President Thein Sein, it is apparent that their ultimate goal extends beyond ethnic cleansing to full-blown genocide. At present, the Rohingya are being restricted to specific geographic areas and internment camps, and being denied food. Many are starving, or dying of disease.

The Rohingya people have been in the country for centuries. To attempt to wipe or throw them out is a crime against humanity. If this continues, it will leave an indelible stain on modern Burma that will be recognized by the world, and as with the Nazis not soon forgotten.

Indeed, if the regime passes a new "citizenship" law, and then uses this as the basis for expelling the Rohingya, it would change nothing. This would be an example of an *ex-post-facto* law, making something illegal that has already occurred, which is shunned by all societies that have a civilized rule of law.

Rakhine, Burman and other racists might not like it, but the Rohingya are one of Burma's peoples. They must have all the rights of any other group. If the racists can't accept this, that's tough. In a democracy, no one gets everything that they want, and this is certainly the case when what they want is immoral.

I can also comment that when these same individuals accept the presence of thousands and thousands of Chinese immigrants, none of whom followed a legal immigration and citizenship procedure, the hypocrisy is breathtaking.

The war crimes against the Kachin

The International Community for the most part is ignoring the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. It is shocking to see this occur in 2013, but given the remote area, and that Rohingya bodies have been dumped in the sea and in mass graves, there is little concrete evidence that would compel

the United Nations Security Council, and major powers the United States and the European Union, to act.

This same excuse, though, can't be used with the regime's civil war against the Kachin. It is far less remote, extending to the cities of Myitkyina and Bhamo. It is also well-documented, including in recent weeks with dozens of video clips.

There have been thousands of casualties, which alone should be enough to put the conflict on the Security Council's agenda, but there are other issues as well. The Burma Army is now employing Russian attack helicopters and Chinese jets against the Kachin. These aircraft have used Chinese airspace, and are rumored to be piloted by Russians and/or Chinese. An agreement to allow use of the airspace, and for other assistance, was apparently reached on December 27th, at a meeting of Chinese and Burmese generals, right across the border in Ruili, China, at the Yurui Hot Spring Hotel.

The Army is further using tanks, howitzers, and also Swedish rocket launchers obtained from India. And, the Army is again committing yet another crime prohibited by international convention, the use of chemical weapons in the form of gas mortar bombs.

On the human rights side, villages have been bombed, villagers killed, and village women raped and killed by Army soldiers. The new offensive is targeting the Kachin HQ at Laiza. This means that the tens of thousands of internally displaced persons sheltering there are at risk of death.

This is now a major conflict, after Syria arguably the most active war in the world. (It's worse than the intermittent clashes in Afghanistan.) How can the international community, and for that matter the international media, ignore it?

Also, the international community cannot use the excuse that there is limited media coverage to justify their inaction. Through their intelligence networks, they know exactly what is going on. Individuals such as U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, and President Obama, undoubtedly receive weekly if not daily updates on the Burma Army's war against the Kachin.

I will consider the question of why the world, and also Burma's pro-democracy parties, are ignoring the war, and the Rohingya genocide, at the end of the article.

Nationwide ceasefire

This is an easy subject to cover. The regime approached the different resistance groups seeking ceasefire agreements. The groups in turn responded that they wanted a national ceasefire. The generals then refused to consider this.

One of the main points that the optimists have been broadcasting is the existence of the separate ceasefire agreements that have been signed. They are trumpeting as positive what is actually a

negative development. The regime's entreaties to the resistance groups are yet more examples of its long-standing use of the tactic of divide and conquer, as a means to split the opposition. Through negotiating the individual ceasefires, the generals have not only effectively disarmed much of their strongest opposition, in some cases they have even induced the groups to become close allies.

It is no coincidence that the regime's new offensive against the Kachin was launched following its "victory" at the recent KNU Congress, whereby pro-appeasement leaders gained power. With KNU leaders in their pocket, and as discussed later, leaders of the SSA-S as well, two of the strongest resistance armies have - for the moment at least - been defanged.

Given its success with these groups, and the fact that other groups such as the Wa, Mongla, DKBA, and those groups that willingly became Border Guard Forces, remain firm allies, there is no chance - none whatsoever - that the Army will accept a nationwide ceasefire.

Its strategy is in fact the opposite, to make ceasefires with some groups, attack others, and then when they are defeated attack the ceasefire groups. This way, as with the Kokang, who were routed in 2009, the generals can pick off their opposition one group at a time. Therefore, instead of a nationwide ceasefire, regime offensives against the ethnic nationalities will continue for decades to come, or at least for as long as their homelands retain valuable natural resources worth stealing.

Drafting a new Constitution

This subject too is easy. The regime-drafted constitution cannot be amended without at least a 75 percent vote of approval by Parliament. There is no way that the generals, who hand-picked Parliament, will allow this to happen. The dictatorship's goal has been clear all along. It has even been openly communicated to the ethnic nationalities during the ceasefire talks. They must accept the current Constitution.

Aung San Suu Kyi is living in a dream world if she thinks there is any hope that the Constitution can be fundamentally altered. However, since she has proved so accommodating, actually defending the generals in the court of international public opinion, they may throw her a bone and eliminate the provision that prohibits her from running for President. A tame Suu Kyi as President, to keep the corporate development dollars flowing, but with them unassailably in charge, would be - to them - an ideal setup.

Conducting a new census

There are plans to conduct Burma's first real census since the 1930s (80 years!). This process will be fraught with problems, and may even trigger a new popular uprising.

Burma is a large and mountainous country. Getting out into the hinterlands to survey people will be a logistical nightmare. It will also be expensive, and the census initiative is significantly underfunded. Moreover, widespread participation by the people, certainly ethnic nationality people, who still live in great fear of the regime, is unlikely.

These facts alone mean that the population overall is likely to be undercounted, and severely undercounted in the ethnic areas.

A related problem, as occurred in the last official but discredited census in 1983, is of registering ethnic nationality people accurately. In 1983, the regime falsely registered many ethnic nationality Buddhists as Burmans. There is no reason to believe that the generals won't try to do this again.

A huge undercounting, and misrepresentation, of ethnic nationality people will affect their prospects in the next general election, scheduled for 2015. They are unlikely to take this lying down. If the people believe that 2015 is fraudulent, a repeat of 2010, widespread unrest is probable.

It is also worth noting why the regime would want to undercount the ethnic peoples. The generals of the country's military dictatorship are Burmans, the largest ethnic group. They are also racists. They believe that they are superior, and destined to rule, and that the other ethnic groups are inferior if not savages. We see evidence of this simple fact again and again, in their Constitution (they will never allow federalism, or a new Panglong-style conference); their colonial aggression against the ethnic groups; their approach to ceasefire negotiations with them; etc. The core problem in Burma is inequality between the Burmans and everyone else, and that is just the way the generals like it.

The regime's support for genocide against the Rohingya illustrates not only this racism; it is also an example of the tactic of branding a weak group as a common enemy.

Creation of new political parties

In a country with freedom of association, individuals with political aspirations register different parties to represent their needs and concerns. Given Burma's diversity, and parliamentary system, one might expect many, many different parties to be established, and to compete in the elections. The NLD's stranglehold on the opposition would be reduced if not eliminated.

As with the census, this step too is unlikely to occur. The regime benefits from having the opposition centered under Suu Kyi and the NLD. It will not allow the widespread formation of new parties. Rather, it will impose procedural hurdles to block such a development.

Fundamentally, forming a new party is a type of dissent. But, the regime's complete opposition to dissent has in no way changed.

Holding of a free election

There will probably be a regime-managed election in 2105, unless the dictators are overthrown in the interim. Absent this development, as in 2010 the election will no doubt be riddled with fraud if not completely rigged.

Any objective observer can only reach this conclusion. The generals have Parliamentary control. They do not want to give this up. They will therefore take any and all steps required to see that they don't have to.

The by-election in 2012 was a purposeful exception. They wanted Suu Kyi in office to control her and to legitimize their so-called reform. But, enough is enough. There is no evidence whatsoever to believe that they will ever be willing to cede real power.

Revamping of the legal system

It's on the critical path, but it will never happen. It may be Suu Kyi's main goal, a real rule of law, but she can forget about it. She refuses to use the only real power that she has, the power of her voice. As with amending the Constitution, there is no way that this type of change can be achieved inside the military-dominated Parliament.

Prosecution of regime criminals

Don't make me laugh. Suu Kyi herself has said that the regime's thousands and thousands of murderers, rapists and other criminals should not be prosecuted. She doesn't even consider the very worst abuses, such as the ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya, crimes. She has cemented the regime's impunity, to which it has reacted, logically, with new atrocities.

2. SUCCESSFUL REVOLUTION AGAINST THE DICTATORSHIP

So, the repression in Burma continues. There's still war and ethnic cleansing, not to mention political prisoners, theft, extortion, forced labor - the full laundry list of a typical dictatorship's crimes. The only possible solution is for the people to rise up, to throw the bastards out. This again leads to the question, if other countries - in the last twenty years many other countries - can do it, why not Burma?

This failure reflects a complicated equation. To understand it, we need to review the strategy and actions of the regime, the people, Suu Kyi and the NLD, the ethnic nationalities, and international parties.

The military regime

Burma's history has been dominated by a number of Burman-led kingdoms, which ended with the war with the British in the 1820s and their subsequent colonial administration. However, the present day country was never really unified. Major land areas remained under the control of local powers, even during British rule.

Many Burmans today view the kingdoms with pride, and the British period as the low point. This perspective hasn't always held, though, certainly by the ethnic nationalities, and even by Burman villagers and townspeople in the past.

For example, Burman kings regularly attacked the other ethnic groups, and also invaded Thailand many times. In these conflicts the Kings raised armies using force, with the threat of killing the soldiers' families if they refused to fight.

What this also shows is that Burma's history predates the formation of nation-states. The kingdoms were empires that fought to extend their reign. A nation, with a prescribed border and within which all the people were controlled - governed, has never existed.

The reason why I have described this history is because in fact nothing has changed. Even now, Burma is not really a country. (If you do use the description, it can only be viewed as a failed state.) Rather, the military dictatorship has actually achieved its goal, of establishing a fourth Burman empire. Than Shwe, who is supposedly retired, is Burma's King.

If you think of Burma this way, a lot of the points that I made above fall into place. Thein Sein's real role is as adjutant to Than Shwe. The people of Burma are subjects. Given the regime's underlying racism, Burmans continue to be treated more favorably than the ethnic nationalities. Groups that openly resist, such as the Kachin, are targeted with military campaigns.

To solidify his power, King Shwe has also made alliances with other powerful individuals (Karen and Shan leaders), groups (the Wa and Mongla), neighboring countries (China, India and Thailand), and even countries far afield (the United States, Germany, Norway, and Japan).

The big difference now is that ordinary Burmans are being treated with significantly less repression. They can pursue business opportunities, and are only brutalized when they openly dissent. This change is designed to reduce their desire to rebel, and also to turn them against the other ethnic groups. Than Shwe wants to convert ordinary Burmans into racists, who will view the other groups as antagonists, not victims. The ultimate goal is to create a more modern Burma, but which is still under the absolute control of the regime. In this modern, capitalist Burma, the Burmans will receive advantages and prosper (to them, the dictatorship will be benevolent), but the other groups will be either assimilated, held back and repressed, or wiped out (the dictatorship will be totalitarian and genocidal).

The people

It's a mistake to think of the people of Burma as a single amorphous body. There are many different groups, and which throughout history have often been at odds.

The largest group, the Burmans, have never openly resisted the military regime, other than through the armed rebellion of the students who formed the ABSDF, following the 1988 massacre. Even the actions of the Saffron uprising monks in 2007 were not fundamental acts of resistance.

The reason I say this is that their goal was not freedom for the country. It's important to remember what happened. The regime doubled energy prices in August 2007, in response to which 88 Generation and NLD activists took to the streets. They were quickly arrested, which led to a solidarity protest by monks in the town of Pakoku. The regime then assaulted the monks, which led to large-scale demonstrations by many more monks, in Rangoon, Mandalay and elsewhere. There was never an overarching theme of liberation to any of the protests.

Also, while many Burmans who were arrested for other protests, dating back to 1988 and even earlier, and who following their arrests became political prisoners, were calling for democracy, it is important to remember the nature of their actions. Most were arrested for peaceful protests. They effectively sacrificed themselves, to make a point.

I do not mean to devalue their incredible heroism in any way. (I have many friends who have been political prisoners.) I just want to say that other than with the ABSDF, and some Communist Party of Burma members, no Burmans have ever fought back. There has never even been a concerted campaign of civil disobedience and sabotage, even though a network of underground groups called the Political Defiance Committee was established (and funded!), and which presumably - given its name - had such resistance as its objective.

The Burman cities and towns of the country's central valleys have never even seen the widespread marking of buildings with pro-liberation graffiti, which is the simplest and safest revolutionary act.

I certainly don't believe that Burmans lack a fighting heart. There are good explanations for why they never developed an analogue to, say, South Africa's African National Congress.

The first reason is that even prior to the changes starting in 2010, there has been an asymmetry of suffering in the country. The regime, reflecting its racism, targeted the ethnic nationalities (most notoriously through the Four Cuts program). The ethnic nationalities in turn fought back in self-defense.

When someone is actively trying to kill you and your family, you have no choice but to fight back.

This has rarely been the case for Burman townships, and also ethnic communities in Western Burma. It is for this reason that most of the war has been in the North and the East.

The other reason is that many people in the country, and not only Burmans, are cowed. They have suffered for so long, they have been beaten down.

During the Saffron uprising I made the comment that if Suu Kyi - even though she was under house arrest at the time - would support the protests, they would grow to millions and the regime would fall. (Remember, monks marched to her house - she had this opportunity.) She didn't do it, though, which was one of her greatest mistakes.

But even still, the people shouldn't have needed her. With the monks leading the way, many Burma supporters were surprised that the crowds did not continue to expand. For example, the regime beat and killed monks in Rangoon. In many countries this type of act would have provoked an uncontrollable public rage.

The deeper problem is that the people of Burma have adapted, to centuries of horrific repression and abuse. What they experience is way beyond what people in other countries, which lack such a history, would find intolerable.

This is the idea that a person can be inured or desensitized to anything, no matter how bad it might be. Perhaps one of your family members is killed, or dies from disease? In Burma, it's probably not the first time, and nor will it be the last. A friend is imprisoned? Ditto.

I've written many times about how the people need to be politicized, as a first step to rising up, but this is the real problem. Many people have given up. They will accept literally anything without complaint. I believe this is the case with Suu Kyi as well.

Not to be too negative: There is one encouraging development that started last year. People appear to be willing to protest, when their land is stolen for corporate exploitation. This common crime is now triggering a self-defense response, even among Burmans. There may be a way forward, then, through organizing more and larger anti-development protests.

In summary, the regime is doing its best to favor the Burmans, to turn them against the ethnic nationalities, but at the same time maintaining the yoke of repression (witness Letpadaung), so they won't ask for more. The war against the Kachin also serves the purpose of a threat: If you ever actively turn against us, we will do this to you, too.

Suu Kyi and the NLD

Aung San Suu Kyi is no longer a force for freedom and democracy in Burma. She has been completely co-opted, and is now part of the military regime. Indeed, this is such an astonishing development, it is still hard to believe.

(The NLD is even being funded by Than Shwe's business cronies - what a payoff!)

She absolutely should never be President. She does not deserve it, or any of the prizes with which she has been showered. Her support for the Burma Army, and her silence in the face of its never-ending atrocities, have unquestionably meant that more people have been attacked and killed. Were she to raise her voice, the regime, if only a little, would back off (just as it did after she protested the Myitsone Dam). The generals fully understand that she has the power to lead the Burman people to rise up.

It seems clear that she wishes that these terrible problems, starting with the Rohingya and Kachin, would just go away. (I wouldn't be surprised if deep in her heart she wants the Burma Army to defeat the Kachin.) She doesn't understand that nothing happens of its own accord. Problems must be made to go away. They have to be solved, and the solutions are both difficult and dangerous. They require intelligent and heroic leadership.

Suu Kyi regularly complains now about how she is very busy, by which she means with the daily responsibilities of being an MP, and her duties as head of two committees: The commission of enquiry for Letpadaung, and the Rule of Law committee. But both of these committees are pressure-relief valves, designed to pacify the public. The Letpadaung commission is only charged with evaluating the impact of the copper mine, not the regime's crackdown on protestors using fire bombs. And the responsibility of the Rule of Law Committee, "includes monitoring "concerned organisations" that are potentially involved in circumstances that may damage the tranquility of the state." (Source: DVB) Not only are these committees designed to cover-up regime crimes, the latter can even be used against the public. In any case, as with the regime commission on the Rohingya, they will never accomplish anything positive.

Suu Kyi also clearly wants to run for President in 2015. However, Burma does not need a leader in the sense of an ordinary MP. It needs a leader who will confront publicly every issue that I have described in this article - every issue on the critical path to freedom. She either refuses to lead, or more likely is incapable of leading, on these subjects.

I always hoped that she would come to her senses, and reclaim her former self - the one who, even though she was a pacifist, did have the courage to speak out. But this is having blind faith on my part. The best course of action now is to ignore her - to forget about her, and move on to what can be accomplished.

As for the NLD, there are many strong and determined pro-democracy activists within its ranks. Their problem is that they are overshadowed by Suu Kyi and the other elderly leaders. Because of this, their efforts can never be effectively devoted to positive change.

NLD members should abandon the Party, and form new alternatives. This has already happened in some places, after local party heads refused to let younger generation members have any real say. The NLD under Suu Kyi is also functioning like a dictatorship. Its members would be best served by creating democratic alternatives, in which everyone has a voice.

The ethnic nationalities

The ethnic nationalities have been willing to fight, but with only limited success. Taken together they would be incredibly powerful: With their local knowledge more than a match for the Burma Army. Large sections of the country could be freed, and turned into safe zones for the people. Even more, a string of victories would put so much pressure on the regime that it would collapse.

A military solution to the problems in Burma, and with no involvement whatsoever from Suu Kyi and the NLD, is still possible.

Unfortunately, though, and unlike the allies who in World War II combined to defeat the Nazis and Japan, Burma's ethnic nationalities have been unable to accomplish this degree of unity. They have never been able to work together effectively against the modern military dictatorship (since 1962). Many times they have even opposed each other, and also themselves, since a number of groups have been riven by internal splits.

There are many reasons for this, starting with the terrain. The different groups are separated from each other by mountains, so it is difficult to hold meetings to plan campaigns, and then to work together on the battlefield. Moreover, and as described above, the regime has been extremely successful at maneuvering against them. When the Communist Party of Burma collapsed in 1989, and split into different ethnic armies, in Shan and Kachin States, the regime was able to approach these armies and strike ceasefire deals. This left resistance groups in other areas, particularly along the border with Thailand, exposed. The Burma Army was thus able to redirect its troops from the north against them, notably the Karen. The regime was also able to turn Buddhist Karen against Christian, thereby enabling the split of the DKBA from the KNLA (although the Karen leadership also bore a lot of the blame for this).

A deeper reason behind ethnic disunity though is the aforementioned history. By not being part of a real country, the different groups never developed an identity - a national identity - which they all shared. They therefore never had anything for which they were all fighting together. Also, on the subject of division within groups, this history meant that certain groups were "a people" on paper only. For example, again with the Karen, there are different subgroups, which use different languages, and which reside in different areas. There has never been a process by

which they were unified, other than the modern reaction to the dictatorship, and which we have seen, which unity the generals have been able to prevent.

A final point, and which is also derived from the history, is that perhaps the greatest distinction between the groups is that they have different goals. They all want an end to regime oppression, but this has in a sense been a selfish motive, because what they mean by it is an end to the repression that they personally suffer. They have never been able to ally and pursue the goal of not only ending the abuses against their own people, but against all the different groups in Burma.

For example, the Kachin Independence Army had as its goal, at least originally, independence - freedom - for the Kachin people. Similarly, the Karen National Liberation Army. But these groups were misnamed, since they never undertook concerted offensive operations to win territory. Rather, their operations have been defensive. There has never been a unified resistance army, dedicated to fighting with the single-minded goal of winning freedom for the entire country.

However, and like the protests that now take place over land thefts, the new United Nationalities Federal Council initiative (since last year) is a very positive development. It clearly has a leading role to play in the effort to achieve democratic change. For example, the UNFC has a plan to establish a Federal Army. Were such a force to be created, and conduct coordinated offensive operations against the Burma Army across a number of regions, the dictatorship would find itself ill-prepared to respond.

The UNFC still has a way to go to achieve this goal, and its overall mission of “*one for all*.” For example, a number of strong groups, notably the Shan State Army - South, refuse to join. SSA-S leaders have made their own one-sided deal with the regime. (The deal favors the dictatorship.) As a result, Shan soldiers are moving to Thailand to find jobs. Shan villagers call the leaders “*york soot*” - useless rags.

Other groups that are members of the UNFC, like the KNU - under its new, illegitimate leaders (the process by which they were elected was not free and fair), and the New Mon State Party, are averse to armed combat and instead prefer appeasement.

Still other groups - the Wa, Mongla, DKBA, and BGF - are openly regime allies and would never participate.

Nonetheless, the group has powerful core members in the KIA and SSA-North who are fighting, and a timely motivation to act to oppose the regime’s current aggression against them. If the KNU can ever reverse its own electoral swindle, not only would the Karen people’s interests again be served, the group could form the southern flank of a Federal Army front, and take the war to, and ultimately defeat, the regime. “Liberation” would no longer be an empty phrase.

International parties

As I said at the beginning, international parties, including the media, have focused on what they are calling positive steps since 2010 in Burma. They've done their best to ignore the ethnic cleansing, war and war crimes, widespread land thefts, and the fact that the 2010 election itself was fraudulent - that the vast majority of MPs are from the regime and are the enemy of the people. They are also uniformly in love with Suu Kyi, and believe she can do no wrong. They further downplay the ethnic issue, and have had limited - or no - contact with ethnic leaders.

Their singular motivation for adopting these positions - and this extends to the media - has been greed: The idea that they, or the businesses that they represent, can participate in the Burma Gold Rush. With so much money at stake - there are literally billions if not hundreds of billions of dollars to be made in the exploitation of one of the world's last natural and labor resource hotspots - it is easy to ignore almost anything.

I imagine George Soros is well on his way to recouping one-hundred fold the money he gave to the pro-democracy movement. What an amazing hedge fund shark!

In summary, international parties have proven willing to do their part to ensure that the dictatorship survives - that the country is raped environmentally and economically and that the generals face no threat to their power in the process.

It is China all over again, albeit on a smaller scale.

As another example, the Norwegian funded "Peace Center" has been a prime mover in ensuring the dishonest change of power in the Karen National Union. Norway is also a principal motivator in the effort to force refugees to return to Burma to become indentured laborers. (The only jobs that they will be able to get will have identical conditions to those now performed by the migrant serfs working in Thailand.)

The U.S. under President Obama has taken the most rosy eyed view of all, ending its sanctions and appointing Derek Mitchell to serve as trade assistant to help U.S. corporations "penetrate" the Burma market.

It is also highly unlikely that the Administration will apply the provisions of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Since bribery is par for the course in Burma, enforcing the law would deny American companies entry. General Electric, Coke, and all the companies attending U.S. Chamber of Commerce meetings in Rangoon, can breathe easy. The White House will ignore bribes paid to win contracts, either permanently (as with China), or as long as it can plead ignorance - only responding after real journalists investigate (as with *The New York Times* and Walmart in Mexico).

I could go on and on (starting with the United Nations), but what's the point? The international community, almost without exception, stands with Burma's dictators.

Conclusion

With all of this as staging, one would suspect that 2013 does not bode well for Burma. Even with its differential repression, the military regime still holds all the cards, and is the enemy of the people of the country.

Aung San Suu Kyi, in her imperturbable silence, is also the enemy of the people.

Many ethnic leaders are corrupted, and are not only the enemies of their own groups, but of all the people.

And, the members of international community, not only neighbors China, Thailand and India, but everyone else as well, are enemies of the people.

The battle is so one-sided that it makes the Biblical story of David and Goliath look fair, if not advantage to David! At least he had a weapon in his sling.

The implications of all of this are obvious. The critical path that I described, which is the only road to real freedom and democracy, can never be achieved without revolution and the defeat of the regime. Suu Kyi's reform cannot possibly succeed. (She's no fool - she knows this, too.)

The launching of a revolution though still requires surmounting a number of hurdles. These include the disinclination of Burmans to fight, the fact that virtually everyone in the country has reached a point of despair (at least as far as real freedom is concerned), and that the ethnic groups are not united.

Fortunately, the people of Burma do have authentic weapons. While the U.S. will never give them Stinger missiles to shoot down regime warplanes and helicopters, they do have two strengths which should be sufficient to overcome anything, even what I have described.

The first of these is open communications. For the first time Burma has growing cellphone and Internet service. Using these tools the people can achieve freedom of thought, and speech, and association. The regime does not and is unlikely to ever have the massive censorship apparatus that exists in China. The people can use this one real, new freedom, in thousands upon thousands of towns and villages, to organize at the grass roots level, and without any need to follow centralized orders from Suu Kyi and the NLD.

Secondly, the people have free will, and although it has been degraded by years of repression, it can be strengthened again through the new freedom. The people can escape their fear, not under

Suu Kyi's leadership, but on their own. They can protest, and fight, and rebel. And with this possibility 2013 does not look so bleak after all.

Things are changing fast in Burma. The KIA has had many victories. Even if it loses its headquarters at Laiza, the regime will face never-ending, debilitating guerrilla warfare. (This is what defeated the powerful American military machine in Vietnam.)

Furthermore, thousands of people demonstrated at Letpadaung. Not only can they demonstrate again, this can be repeated throughout the entire country. Every exploitation development, starting with every major Chinese project, can be stopped in its tracks.

2013 can be the year that the people of Burma finally and unequivocally start to fight for real freedom. Once they get going, nothing will hold them back.

The final comment that I would like to make is that for this to be happen, as quickly as possible, the people need supportive media. They need information sources that tell them not only what is happening around the country, but which also present and develop nation-wide liberation themes. Blogs and Facebook groups can accomplish a lot, but the people need more. They need media - national media - to be their allies in the fight for freedom. They need media sources that cast aside supposed journalistic objectivity, but which is really the deceit of publishing false equivalences. Said another way, they need media that are not cowardly and servile: Which refuse to parrot the regime, and instead devote themselves to working with the people against it. The Irrawaddy, Democratic Voice of Burma, Mizzima, Eleven Group, Voice Weekly, and the many, many other outlets, should quit pandering to the generals and Suu Kyi, and instead talk about what is really happening in the country, and truly assist the people to bring the dictatorship to its end.