

AUNG SAN SUU KYI: BURMA'S ROBERT MUGABE

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Robert Mugabe is the dictator of Zimbabwe. It wasn't always this way. Zimbabwe was formerly a British colony, called Rhodesia. Mugabe in his younger years was a freedom fighter. He spent ten years as a political prisoner. He led the Zimbabwe African National Union. In 1979, the Rhodesia Bush War ended, and the following year he was elected Prime Minister. He remains in power, to this day.

Mugabe was viewed as a hero. But as he aged he became autocratic, and determined not to yield his rule. Now in his fourth decade of power, Zimbabwe has suffered immeasurably, and is one of the least developed and most repressive nations in the world.

Mugabe is also known to be prejudiced against a number of the ethnic groups of Zimbabwe, who as a consequence have independence aspirations. He has had close relations with China since the last year of the war. China is now a major investor in Zimbabwe, and workers at Chinese projects are subject to the worst forms of exploitation. The international community in turn has applied only limited pressure for change. The U.N., for example, was recently criticized by its own investigators for downplaying a cholera epidemic in the country.

Now, for Burma watchers, this probably sounds all too familiar, even like *deja vu*. Substitute the name Suu Kyi for Mugabe, and little other than the location needs to be changed. Burma was a British colony as well. Suu Kyi backs - or at a minimum refuses to condemn - the regime's aggression against the country's ethnic nationalities. She is also a huge supporter of China, and has even stood by Beijing in the Letpadaung mine crisis against members of her own ethnic group, the Burmans. And lastly, she is the international community's darling, with the U.N. recently even allowing its aid caravans to Kachin refugees to be used as cover for the Burma Army to infiltrate reinforcements to the front. (The U.N. is truly a collection of Useless Nations.)

Suu Kyi's evolution

The evolution of Suu Kyi from democracy icon to autocrat has followed a similar route. In fact, I have always been suspicious of her, and even criticized her in my first press release eleven years ago, for her belief that one can accomplish real change by negotiating with a gang of serial killers. My criticism at the time though was extremely deferential. The subjects of personality cults must be approached carefully. The consequences of her wrong-headed policy are now so severe, however, that she must be confronted head-on.

Suu Kyi has never acted like a real pro-democracy advocate, and not only because of her adherence to a dogmatic form of pacifism that even Gandhi would reject. There are many pro-

democracy movements around the world, and they all share common traits. Foremost of these is that the people *resist* - they press for change. Suu Kyi has never called for pressure against the military - far from it, not even after the generals stole the 1990 election, when she could have asked ordinary soldiers - who backed her - to change sides. And, as far as I know, she has never hoisted the Fighting Peacock banner. She is not her father's daughter.

Indeed, during her trips around the country, they seemed more like self-glorification events, with her standing as an empress on a balcony, waving to the crowd. She did not go to clandestine meetings to organize an underground resistance. And, she made no attempts to meet - she never even mentioned - the ethnic nationality resistance groups.

Then, starting last year, her real nature became openly apparent. She and she alone commanded the NLD to enter the by-election, through which she became an MP. She then stopped advocating for the release of political prisoners, which had been her only tangible pro-democracy activity. Following this she went on to back the regime in its war with the Kachin, and its ethnic cleansing of the Rohingya. Now, with Letpadaung, she has even turned on her own people.

She said: "*Why do they want the mountain?*," and "*Those who do not respect the rule of law, they get punished.*" The latter comment is amazing, because she apparently considers the military mafia that runs the country legitimate, and the ordinary people who oppose it criminals, and who through her statement she has now threatened.

The villagers responded: "*We want our Letpadaung mountain*"; "*Her report is like a death sentence for the people*"; "*All the love for you, it's nothing*"; and "*We feel bad for General Aung San's name.*"

The significance of her earlier comment to the *Wall Street Journal*, when she said of the general public, "*we've told them what they need to know,*" should also not be underestimated. She has now transformed this to: "*They must do what I say.*" In other words, she is now, openly, a dictator.

Suu Kyi's ignorance

Suu Kyi, who formerly supported the U.S. sanctions against business investment in Burma, is now exploitative development's loudest cheerleader. Indeed, she called the villagers at Letpadaung ignorant, for not accepting that they should unquestionably sacrifice themselves for Burma's supposed greater good. But here I can no longer compromise the demand for intellectual honesty; I must state the unvarnished truth. It is Suu Kyi and her cultish followers - who have repeated her statements - who are the ones that are ignorant. And, by ignorant, I mean uneducated, not hopelessly stupid.

Suu Kyi is ignorant because, first, she does not understand human rights. The Rohingya issue is not about citizenship. It is about human rights. Rohingya children are dying of disease right now

in the regime's concentration camps. This is an atrocity, and which must be opposed in the strongest terms by anyone who professes to stand for human rights. Furthermore, the positions of the Kachin, Shan, Karenni, Karen and other ethnic nationality peoples are not equivalent to the Burma Army's. The Army is the aggressor. The ethnic groups are the victims. Understanding human rights means not only understanding the set of rights that we possess through being alive; it also requires the ability to distinguish between those groups who seek to deprive others of their rights, and the self-defense actions of the victims in response. Suu Kyi is more than just a politician positioning for a future election. She clearly does not grasp any of this.

She is further ignorant about development, which as it is now being practiced in Burma is yet another type of deprivation of rights. She says yes to land thefts, and no to protest. That is her development policy. She further says that outstanding contracts which enshrine the thefts are sacrosanct, and must be followed. She believes that business in Burma should be for the benefit of regime cronies, China, Singapore, and Western investors, not the local people. She is also ignorant of the fact that all outstanding contracts with the regime should be suspended, and then reviewed, and either renegotiated, or cancelled if there is no way to make them supportive of the people. More than anything she is ignorant of the fact that what Burma needs first and foremost is political development, starting with freedom from tyranny, then democracy - real democracy, and then the rule of law, a real, functioning rule of law, after which commercial development might be considered. She is a charlatan for trying to dupe the people of Burma into believing that this order can somehow be turned around.

Burma needs political development, and social development, including sufficient food, clean water, schools and clinics, and only after this economic. And for economic development, the initial focus should be on food production and small scale, environmentally-friendly industry, including resource extraction.

The corruption of Aung San Suu Kyi

Now, the question remains, why did she reverse course from at least preserving the face of advocating for democracy, to openly opposing it? The answer to this is simple. She has become corrupted.

First, she has been corrupted by power. A developing Burma, even if most if not all of the development is bad, means fast and big change, and with her at the center. Suu Kyi clearly does not want to disappear into the background, and the only way to ensure her status, she apparently believes, is to embrace the change. This is the deal with the devil that she has made with the International Community.

Secondly, she is now being corrupted by money as well, which is the standard definition of the term. People have been calling on her to present a detailed and well-reasoned set of policies for Burma for some time. But from the recent NLD congress, no such platform emerged. One of the few specific policies which was published, though, according to Xinhua, is to "*cooperate in*

exploring business undertakings which bring mutual benefit to countries, especially that benefit local people.”

The last clause is hogwash, given what has just happened at Letpadaung, but the main policy is telling. It implies that the NLD is about to go into business. And, speaking sarcastically, why shouldn't it? With the Burma Gold Rush underway, why shouldn't the NLD profit, too, including at the expense of the local people?

It is public knowledge that Senior General Than Shwe's closest cronies are now funding the NLD. It wouldn't be surprising if the NLD name, in some form, soon appears on business contracts with these cronies as well. Indeed, Suu Kyi can put her huge Peace Prize award to work as well. I'm sure the cronies will give her a significant holding for a song. She should be asked, point blank: Has she used any of the prize money to make business investments, and if so, with whom?

I would also not rule out - at all - the possibility that she - or her associates, have not only been offered, but taken, actual bribes, in exchange for toeing the USDP line.

The Suu Kyi cult

Another question concerning her about face is why did she feel confident doing it? How was she so certain that the people would follow her? The answer to this is that she fully understands - indeed, she has cultivated - the near god-like status with which many people revere her.

Relative to the issue of economic development, there are now a number of different groups in Burma. For starters, there are the people who reject it, who believe that the change is false - Than Shwe's puppet show - and that the best policy is to go slow and to continue to resist. This includes many ethnic nationality leaders and most ethnic nationality people; NLD escapees (but not the National Democratic Force); and largely Burman resistance groups such as the ABFSU. An open question is where 88 Generation stands.

Next is the go fast crowd, including opportunists both Burman and ethnic nationality. While this group manifests the relief at the minor positive changes that the regime has allowed in central Burma, it mainly derives from the selfish motivations of these people to profit personally from the change. Indeed, many opportunists are so corrupted that if the police were to torture a monk to death in broad daylight at Shwedagon Pagoda, they wouldn't even look up from their tea leaf salads at the Strand Hotel.

Finally, there is the Suu Kyi cult, who don't understand or for that matter even care about what is going on. Their allegiance to her is complete. They will follow her anywhere, and ignore any misstep, and also critical press such as this. Moreover, they will rise to her defense and in an aggressive and expletive-filled way.

This cult is the real source of her power, and for Burma to advance it must be reduced in size. Now, the Letpaduang affair will certainly make a dent. And since Suu Kyi will no doubt continue her authoritarian ways, there will be more Letpadaungs in the future. But cults are strong. They last. And the reason for this is that the members are brainwashed. They therefore need to be deprogrammed, one by one.

The five steps in the standard method of cult deprogramming are listed below (source: Wikipedia). Everyone in Burma who is not a Suu Kyi cult member should do everything they can - they should become deprogrammers - to help those who are.

1. The figure of authority - the cult leader - needs to be discredited.
2. This is done by highlighting the contradictions between the ideology and the reality of the situation.
3. The cult follower then needs to be pushed to the breaking point. When the follower begins to listen to the deprogrammer, this is when reality starts to take precedence over ideology.
4. The follower needs to speak out: to engage in self-expression. He or she needs to open up and voice complaints against the cult.
5. Finally, the follower needs to change his or her self-identification. This is when the follower begins to identify with the deprogrammers, and starts to think of him- or herself as an opponent of the cult, rather than a member of it.

A related problem is the “false” cult of Suu Kyi by the International Community. The countries of the world, and many big NGOs, are her acolytes as well. This is the case even though they understand that her positions are retrograde. They just want access to the Gold Rush that she has enabled.

It is up to activists to oppose this aspect of the cult, at least in democratic countries where they might have some leverage. But, even these countries, such as the U.S., are not real democracies, since corporations - which definitely help propagate the cult - have much better access to policymakers than activists.

Justice for her crimes

One point of attack against the Suu Kyi cult inside Burma is the belief that she has sacrificed so much for the country. But, is this really the case? Certainly her father was assassinated, and she spent a very long time under house arrest - in a comfortable house. How does this stack up to the experiences of other, normal people of the country?

I believe that many, many people have sacrificed far more than her, and who in general get no credit, or support - certainly no prizes - at all. This includes all of the political prisoners who had to suffer in Insein Prison and the dozens of others prisons, living in cells unsuitable for dogs, and who underwent such great torture that many of them died or became mentally unhinged. To

them, I would add all of the ethnic nationality soldiers, who have had to sleep on bamboo platforms covered with banana leaves, and risk their lives fighting a numerically superior force. For that matter, we can add all the villagers, such as those at Letpadaung, who have been driven from their land, including the many who have had family members murdered by the regime in the process. Sacrifice is a relative concept. Suu Kyi has sacrificed, certainly, but her sacrifice has been in no way exceptional compared to so many other people of the country.

And now, she has turned against them, derides them, and has actually threatened them. Not only is she refusing to pursue justice for the people, she wants them to give up even more.

This is an outrage. The people deserve justice for the wrongdoings of Aung San Suu Kyi. While the chances are slim that she can ever be prosecuted, either in Burma or at the International Criminal Court, her behavior should be closely examined to see if it rises to the level of conspiracy and even criminal collaboration. Her basic crimes once again are covering for the use of fire bombs - chemical weapons - by the police against the Letpadaung protestors; her open if tacit support of the ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya, which is a crime against humanity; and her backing of the Burma Army, which has committed countless war crimes, in some cases also involving chemical weapons, in its aggression against many other ethnic nationalities. There is no shortage of possibilities to investigate.

Conclusion

Outside of the actions of the dictatorship, under Ne Win, Saw Maung and Than Shwe, I believe the worst thing that has happened for Burma since 1962 has been the rise of Suu Kyi, together with her receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize. This award enshrined an accidental and half-hearted advocate as a national leader. It is a handicap that has hobbled the country for the last twenty years.

The Nobel Peace Prize in any case is a sentence of death to a pro-democracy movement. This is because when it is given to individuals in dictatorial countries, they are either pacifists who will not push for real change, or they are in actual bed with the regime. The Prize Committee will not select anyone who backs strong, much less revolutionary, measures.

Notwithstanding his many outstanding qualities, an example of the first is the Dalai Lama, whose pacifism has so blocked the movement for freedom in Tibet that dissident monks have been reduced to despair, and self-immolation as their only form of protest. Similarly, many forceful pro-democracy activists for China consider both Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo and last year's Literature Prize winner Mo Yan, as apologists for the CCP, which is ironic since Mr. Liu now finds himself under arrest.

But, returning to Burma, in addition to Suu Kyi, we should also consider the evolution of her organization. One can say that the National League for Democracy is misnamed, because it

rolled over when the 1990 election was stolen, and has never pushed forcefully for democracy ever since. Now the NLD has transformed itself into the National League for Development, since this seems to be the only issue it is really promoting. But, since Suu Kyi's recent actions are so extreme, backing the police and China against fire-bombed monks and farmers, perhaps the correct name is the National League for Dictatorship. However, if you add in the underlying racism, not only against the Rohingya, but against the other ethnic groups as well, probably the best name of all is the RLD, the Racist League for Dictatorship.

Burma can't possibly undergo real progress with Suu Kyi as the leader. Of course, she is not the leader. She's just a willing stooge of the latest incarnation of the military junta, the National Defense and Security Council, which now rules the country from behind the scenes.

In conclusion, the people in Zimbabwe are waiting for Robert Mugabe to die. The country has no chance at freedom until he does. The people of Burma should not have to do the same thing with Suu Kyi. While it is also unlikely that she will disappear from the political scene, her status must be reduced. Burma pro-democracy activists should work hard to change her role, so that she is only the head of the Suu Kyi party, and which is but one of many.

I gather that Burma may be close to seeing bonfires made from Suu Kyi's posters. If and when this happens, I hope the fires are well publicized. I can only say, the sooner we see them, the better.