

THE BURMAN MILITARY : HOLDING THE COUNTRY TOGETHER ?

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THE FORTIETH ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR ASIAN STUDIES
SAN FRANCISCO , MARCH 25 -27, 1988

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On March 2, 1962, the Burma Army under General Ne Win staged a coup. The principal reason given for this act was that the Union was endangered, hence forcing the military to act in order to "keep the country together". The implication was that the Federal Movement, or the move to amend the 1948 Constitution by the Shan (and supported by all non-Burman leaders and state governments), was either a secessionist plot or that it was in itself a threat to the stability and cohesion of the Burmese Union. Surprising enough, though it is now over 25 years since this accusation was first levelled against the Shan princes (chaofa, or saw bwa) in particular, and other non-Burman leaders in general, no evidence has come to light to support the existence of such a "secessionist plot" in the first place. More surprising, indeed perplexing, is the question of why scholars have not taken the trouble to investigate the validity of the alleged secessionist plot before repeating it in various forms.

Burma today faces several serious problems besides the ruined and dead economy, the problem of national unity (or the problem of nation-building or political integration, and specifically, the ongoing ethnic insurgencies), the question of succession, the erosion of the regime's legitimacy, and so on. Of these, the problem of nation-building or the ethnic rebellion is of greater importance, even crucial, because unless peace and some form of unity is restored, very little can be done to tackle other issues and problems. The present pseudo-civilian regime has, it is evident, rejected out of hand Aung San's "unity in diversity" formula and the spirit of Panglong on which the 1948 Constitution was based (actually completed in September 1947). Though this constitution was not really a federal one, it did provide the subordinate units with some autonomy and internal authority. The new 1974 Socialist Constitution has, however, reduced the status of the Shan, Kachin, Karenni and other states and re-constituted them as administrative units, no different from the Sagaing or Mandalay divisions, for example. And worse still, the only legal political party, the ruling Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP), completely dominated and controlled by the Burman military, has not provided the non-Burman with any meaningful role in politics.

From 1949 up to the present,¹ continuous armed conflict between the Burman-dominated central government and the Karen, Mon, Shan, and others, is indicative not only of the misconceptions and misperceptions on both sides, but also indicates the total lack of any non-violent communication channels, particularly since 1962. That is to say, there has been no really clear agreement between the Burman and the non-Burman elites as to what constitutes the Union or the Pyi-daungzu, and no

agreement as to what is meant by nationalism and national unity, or to what sort of superordinate-subordinate relationship should be operative. This ambiguity is made more difficult by Burma's precolonial history where the concept of nationhood in the Western or modern sense did not exist. In ancient Burma, as in all Indo-Asian entities,² the glue that held the polity together was not a national ideology or a mandarin state, but a tributary relationship based upon personal loyalty of the vassals to the person of the king which fluctuated as kings came and went.

British colonial rule in Burma proper, and indirect administration in the peripheral ethnic areas from 1886³ till the Japanese invasion was the first step in the political and administrative evolution of Burma to a Western type of polity. As a matter of fact, the British has since the 1920s, and more explicitly in the 1930s, been committed to the idea of ultimately creating a nation-state of Burma, i.e., bringing together Burma proper and the excluded Frontier Areas to form a single entity.⁴ It seems that this point has been missed, or somehow misplaced by Burma scholars. For some unfathomable reasons many scholars prefer to repeat popular but erroneous sentiments about the British employing a divide-and-rule strategy, pitting the non-Burman against the Burman, and encouraging the Karen, Shan, Kachin and others to aspire to separate nationhood and so forth. There is, in historical reality, no foundation at all for such a myth.

Rather than encouraging separatism, both the colonial authorities and missionaries (who, according to popular myth, are equally guilty of fostering anti-Burman and separatist tendencies), found it more convenient and expedient to encourage Burmanization,⁵ particularly among those non-Burman receptive to the Christian faith. The learning of the Burman language or Burmese⁶ was widely encouraged. Burmese was taught in both missionary and government schools in the Shan State, for example, and the history of Burman kings and dynasties were taught as well. Moreover, among the Shan elites, the Burman language and culture was widely appreciated. For instance, in the princely court of Hsipaw, it was required of princesses and court ladies to recite Burmese poetry, sing classical Burmese songs, play the Burmese harp, and it must be added that many Burman zat (or dance theatres) troupes, of Mandalay especially, were patronized by Shan princes and they performed all over the Shan State at important traditional fiestas or poy. In the Shan State and among the Shan, there was a lively and constant influx of the Burman cultural influence, facilitated in all probability by a shared Buddhist faith and culture. It will be seen therefore that the British and the missionaries did not in any way retard the cultural assimilation of the Shan, Kachin, Karenni and others. Conversely, and more importantly, the British and the missionaries did not encourage any form of cultural separatism. It can even be said that the British completed the task begun by king Alaungpaya (1752-60) of extinguishing the Mon language and culture because of the predominance given to the Burman language, Burmese, and Burman culture.

At this juncture, we must tackle the question of why the British administered the non-Burman areas (respectively called the Excluded Areas, the Scheduled Areas, and finally, the Frontier Areas) separately if the British did not have in mind the balkanization of the country? The relevant and most forthright answer is, simply, expediency. When the British annexed the remaining portion of the Ava kingdom⁷, the court of King Thibaw at Mandalay had by that time very little or no control over the Shan principalities, or over the Karenni⁸, or what is now the Kachin or Chin state. The major Shan princes such as the Chaofa of Hsenwi, of Hsipaw, Chiangtung (Kengtung), Muengnai, and Yawnghwe, and a host of minor ones had not only repudiated their allegiance to the Burman throne but had embarked on a plan to march on Mandalay, overthrow Thibaw, and place on the throne a Shan candidate, the Burman Limbin Prince of the House of Alaungpaya⁹. As a matter of fact it was the British who brought the Shan principalities, albeit retroactively, under Burman suzerainty in 1888 by having the princes acknowledge their tributary subordination to Mandalay as per the treaties signed with the Shan Chaofa at Muengnai and Muangyai.¹⁰

The situation at that time, then, was an already dismembered kingdom, stemming largely from the incompetence of and the loss of effective leaders at the court, due to palace intrigues and coups,¹¹ and the subsequent loss of legitimacy of the king. It was not as if the British took over a united and cohesive kingdom and then proceeded to dismember it to keep it weak and submissive. To the contrary, it must be noted that most colonial powers (the British, the French, the Dutch, etc.) seldom favored the territorial balkanization of colonized territories though they certainly and often have, as a political tactic, tried to fragment political parties and groups once nationalistic movements did appear in the colonies.

Moreover, it was too much to expect the British right after the annexation, to re-integrate the fragmented kingdom and place the Burman in a dominant position again as the Burman nationalists seemed to have expected. One cannot presume this to be the immediate imperative and priority of the British. In terms of economics, commerce and trade, there was enough in Burma Proper itself to keep the British and the Indian trading houses and other financial interests happily occupied and the British authorities busy with building and developing the necessary infrastructures. This, then, was the colonial priority; this, and of course, keeping the country at peace. In particular, it was important to keep the rugged and peripheral non-Burman border territories stable and quiescent so that the potentials of Burma proper could be developed and better exploited. The least costly way to achieve this was to let the non-Burman ethno-national groups govern themselves according to their respective traditions. It can therefore be seen that it was nothing more than expediency which motivated the British to administer the frontier areas separately. But from the 1920s onwards, as Burma proper developed economically and politically, British policy was to ultimately incorporate the peripheral non-Burman homelands with Burma proper. The British can in no way be accused of dismembering the Burman kingdom or for not doing enough to re-integrate the kingdom into a modern

nation-state. If anyone is justified in accusing the British of perfidy it is the Karen, and certainly not the Burman nationalists.

However, there is no denying that the years under the British flag did subsequently create or activate differences in identity among the ethno-national groups of Burma. The economic development of Burma proper and successive forms of self-government introduced by the British from the 1920s onwards brought to the Burman the experience of political participation and political mobilization. This awakened and activated Burman nationalism and their resentment against the Indians¹² and eventually anti-colonial feelings, as elsewhere in Asia. At the same time and also in Burma proper, the Karen too had taken on an identity, particularly among those Christianized and had served in the lower echelon of the colonial bureaucracy, the police, and the military. The identity was as good and loyal subjects of the Empire, and subsequently, the "loyal" Karen identified the Burman nationalists, particularly the Thakins, as subversive and disloyal elements. The Burman nationalists in turn regarded the Karen as despicable servants of the white man. Thus was established in Burma proper, two incidental and diametrically opposed identities based essentially on the attitude the Burman and the Karen respectively held with regard to the British.

In the Frontier Areas and the Shan State, two identities were activated. One identity, among those who served in the military and the police force, was similar to that of the Karen; i.e., as good and loyal subjects of the Empire. Another identity was as a self-governing people to whom the British were benevolent protectors and upholders of law, order, and justice. They were thankful for the British imposed peace, a state which they rarely enjoyed when the Burman kings ruled (and incidentally, have not known since WW II). Naturally therefore, the non-Burman peoples and leaders did not share the anti-colonial¹¹ sentiments of the Burman nationalists, and they moreover did not feel confident in the ability of the Burman to rule ably or justly.¹³ Particularly, the Shan princes were especially worried when in the late 1920s there were talks about incorporating the Frontier Areas with Burma proper, and they petitioned the British for suitable safeguards of Shan autonomy and self-governing status in the event of incorporation.¹⁴ The Shan had long ago developed a relatively sophisticated political system which had served as a model for both the Kachin and the Karenni and were thus proud of their achievement.¹⁵ To argue as some revisionist historians have done¹⁶ that the princes opposed incorporation because they feared losing their feudal privileges altogether misses the point. The fact is that the princes as traditional rulers represented their people, and their people had not shown any signs of wishing to be ruled by the Burman. As a matter of fact, there was no overall "Burmese" nationalism. There was only Burman nationalism which is still the case in Burma today as can be seen from the policy of Burmanization attempted by the Burman elites in order to affect "national unity". We cannot say whether the British attempt at nation-building in Burma would have succeeded had not World War II ended British rule. Perhaps the British might have been

able to incorporate the Frontier Areas within Burma proper, and a "Burmese" identity might have emerged. Ultimately, a "Burmese" nation might have been created. But at present, there is only Burman nationalism.

As history unfolded, World War II broke out and put an end to the British efforts at nation-building. Further, the war not only shattered the myth of British invincibility but awakened all the peoples of Burma. It brought them face to face with the world at large. It was a raw, direct and violent impact unmediated by a third party as was the case previously. There was extensive destruction, widespread dislocation and a total disruption of life. Since Burma was one of the major theatres of war, there was not only much fighting involving men of all races and nations, but more importantly, of ideas as well. There were extensive efforts by the adversaries to mobilize the local population. The Allies parachuted agents and arms into the area, urging the Karen, Kachin, Shan and others, ¹⁷ to fight for their homelands, their nations, their towns and villages. On the other hand, the Japanese exhorted the Burmans to fight for their motherland and to keep the white man out. In short, it was a total psychological revolution. World War II turned the world upside down and mobilized the Burman, the Karen, the Karenni, and the others in a manner they had never experienced before. Ethnic identities and political aspirations were awakened and heightened. The Karen fought the Burman and the Japanese in the name of freedom, while the Burman fought the Karen and the Allied forces also for the cause of freedom. The impact of World War II on the ethno-nationalistic feelings of the peoples of Burma, and their participation in the war on behalf of opposing powers certainly cannot be underestimated as it has direct bearing on subsequent relations between the Burman and the non-Burman.

After the war, the British returned, but not long after, turned over power and the country to the Burman nationalists, the AFPFL (Anti Fascist Peoples Freedom League), who had till the closing months of the war collaborated with the enemy. The non-Burman, who had fought for the British were, paradoxically, ignored. Contrary to claims made by the Burman nationalists and, again, repeated by some historians and writers, ¹⁸ it was not British policy to encourage separatism among the non-Burman peoples. Rather, the policy was to negotiate an orderly transfer of power and responsibility for a unified Burma to the AFPFL. The British Labor government, as a matter of fact, signed an agreement with Aung San agreeing both to independence and the incorporation of the Shan State and other Frontier Areas as per the Aung San-Atlee London Agreement in January 1947. This was a month prior to the historic Panglong Agreement. None of the Frontier Areas leaders were consulted or asked their opinions regarding the incorporation of their homelands within Burma. The London Agreement was a fait accompli which put the non-Burmans in the difficult position of having to negotiate their fate with their wartime enemy, former "traitors" so to speak, without any help from their former ally, the British.

This episode in Burma's history, dealing with the transition of power from the British to the AFPFL which could cast a clearer light on the true situation of the non-Burman has, unfortunately, been so mangled and distorted that it is generally held today that the Shan, Kachin, Chin, and so forth, enjoyed British support, that they were encouraged to distance themselves from the Burman nationalists and to oppose incorporation, or that the "unification" of Burma was achieved despite British subversion and anti-Burman manouvers. In reality, however, a careful study of the report of the Frontier Areas Commission of Enquiry (FACE) will show that the British were determined to ignore whatever misgivings there were among the non-Burmans concerning the joining of their homelands and their destinies with the Burman.¹⁹ As well, the British Labor government's unresponsiveness to several Karen appeals for their safety and rights confounds the myth that the British were especially sympathetic to the Karen because of past loyalties and service.²⁰

It will be seen therefore that the Shan, Karen, Kachin, etc., having been ignored and abandoned by the British, had very little choice but to make the best of the situation at hand, i.e., to negotiate whatever safeguards possible under the circumstance with the Burman nationalists. On the other hand, the Burman political elite, the AFPFL, was also in a difficult position and needed the support of the Shan princes, the Chin chiefs, the Kachin duwas and the Karenni sawphayas in order to fend off its better organized rivals, the Red and White flag Burman communists. Also, the supreme leader of the AFPFL, Aung San, possessed statesman-like qualities and moreover did not ascribe to jingoism and chauvinism which characterized (and still do) Burman nationalism. He was also charismatic and managed to convince the non-Burman that he understood their fears and their mistrust of the Burman, and that he respected and recognized their rights and autonomy. Hence, the Panglong Agreement was signed in a small town by that name in the Shan State on 12th February 1947 in which the non-Burman leaders agreed to cooperate with the interim government of Ministerial Burma (headed by the British Governor) so that "freedom will be more speedily achieved by the Shans, the Kachins, and the Chins by their immediate cooperation with the interim Burmese government..."

Incidentally, the 1947 Panglong Agreement is interesting in the sense that it is not, per se, a document incorporating the Frontier Areas (and the Shan State) with Burma proper. Rather, it is a general agreement providing for Frontier Areas representation in the Governor's Executive Council, and an agreement in principle, though not very specific, for the autonomy of the Frontier Areas in internal administration and finance. In other words, the Panglong Agreement of 1947 is more of a symbol of unification than anything else. More substantial and relevant, and more revealing, would be the deliberations and record of the Constituent Assembly which drafted the constitution in 1947 following the signing of the Panglong Agreement. However, for some reason or other, nothing much of the work done in the framing of the 1948 Constitution is known, commented upon, or studied.²¹

The 1948 Constitution very much reflected the weak bargaining position of the Frontier Areas because the Union or the Pyi-daungzu was, in essence, colonial in structure. Burma proper occupied a special superordinate position as the mother country or pyi-ma, and the Shan, Kachin, and the Karenni State²² (and later, the Mon, Karen, and the Arakan State) were in effect subsidiary and subordinate units. The government of Burma proper (Pyi-Ma) was the central or Union government responsible in practice only to the Burman (and AFPFL)-dominated Chamber of Deputies. The upper Chamber of Nationalities (composed of 53 Burman and 72 non-Burman members) was more like the British House of Lords than the American Senate. The states had therefore very little say in Union affairs, and no voice in matters pertaining to Defence (in particular, no control whatsoever over the Burman-dominated Burma Army), and their legislative power was very limited.²³ According to many non-Burman sources,²⁴ the constitution was meant to be temporary, and they were assured by the Burman leaders that it could and would be amended later. For the moment, it was imperative that the constitution be framed and independence won as soon as possible. Moreover, while the constitution was being drafted, Aung San and the whole interim cabinet was assassinated (in July 1947), and the political situation had deteriorated. It was not a time to quibble or be divisive. The communists were marshalling their forces and preparing for revolution. The AFPFL's own pocket army, the FVO (Peoples Volunteer Organization) had begun to make common cause with the communists, and there was growing Karen-Burman communal strife and violence all over Lower Burma and in the Irrawaddy delta area. It was imperative to maintain a united front against anarchy, both the AFPFL and the non-Burman leaders fearing a communist takeover and revolution (which incidentally was becoming a fact in China, the giant immediately bordering the Kachin and the Shan State). These common needs and fears cemented the bonds between the non-Burman leaders and the AFPFL.

The era of cooperation between the AFPFL and the Shan, Kachin, Chin, and Karenni leaders lasted till the AFPFL finally broke into two factions in 1958. It can however be said with confidence that U Nu, despite great odds and his many failings and faults did, in a meaningful way, keep the country together. That is, the non-Burman elites accepted U Nu as a legitimate leader and ruler and as well, enforced U Nu's and the AFPFL's legitimacy in their respective home states and amongst their own people. This does not imply however that the relationship was smooth all the way. There were problems concerning finance and taxation between the state and the central government, and there were non-Burman charges of racial discriminations and their protests against Burmanization. There arose also the question of Buddhism as U Nu increasingly favored the adoption of Buddhism as a state religion. But these problems were not insoluble or non-negotiable.²⁵ However, there was one major and very serious problem which threatened to, and did, in the final analysis, upset the delicately balanced superordinate-subordinate relationship between the central government and the constituent states. This was no other than the presence of the Burman-dominated Burma Army in the non-Burman homelands.

The Burma Army posed a major problem in the states because the core military leaders were narrowly ethno-nationalistic, xenophobic and inward looking. They saw the army and themselves as the saviors who had shed blood to gain independence and had restored to the Burman race the glory of olden times when Burman kings conquered neighboring kingdoms and subjugated various "lesser" peoples. The Burman military had very little love for the traditional non-Burmese leaders whom it viewed as obstructing national unity and progress, and potentially disloyal. In particular, the Shan princes were viewed as reactionary feudal despots who would one day take the Shan State out of the Union (as a matter of fact, this was the right granted to the Shan State under Chapter X of the Union Constitution). Secondly, the Burman military regarded the quasi-federal arrangement of the country as an unnecessary weakening of national cohesion, an undesirable compromise forced upon Aung San by the British and those feudal leaders. Given such a mind-set and attitude, it was inevitable that the Burman military would have very little sympathy for the aspirations of the non-Burman peoples.

To further complicate matter, because the component states had very little voice at the center, they had therefore no authority over the Burma Army units, officers, or personnels stationed within the various states. In effect, this permitted local Burman military commanders to over-ride local laws and local authority, which in turn created serious problems whenever there were incidents and frictions, to put it mildly, between the Burman soldiery and the non-Burman populace. Whenever there were incidents of rape, looting, killings, the razing of villages, disappearance or abduction (by the dreaded MIS, or the Military Intelligence Service), all that the state governments could do was to report the matter to the central government, or raise the matter in Parliament, or complain to the military commander concerned. This course of action was, in practice, not only futile since such complaints were regarded as impinging upon the honor of brave soldiers, an insult to the army, and as subversive, but was also a dangerous and foolhardy course to take.²⁶ As a result, the atrocities and the resulting resentment accumulated, and the peasants who had suffered the most from the presence and actions of the unruly and ill-disciplined Burman soldiery became increasingly desperate. They became as well, more and more disillusioned with their own leaders, their Members of Parliament, and local administrative officers.

At this juncture, it will be necessary to say more about the Shan princes (sawbwa, in Burmese) since they were important political actors not only within the context of the Shan-Burman relationship, but also because of their role in the Federal Movement, i.e., the move to amend the 1948 Constitution which precipitated the 1962 military takeover. In post-independence Burma, the Shan princes were, from the perspective of practical politics, useful allies for the AFPFL. However, from the ideological viewpoint, the AFPFL and the princes were enemies; the former were ^{self-}professed socialists and believed, in varying degrees, in Marxism, while the former were hereditary and traditional leaders. They were both placed in a very uncomfortable position of having to work together with their ideological

foe. However, the Shan chaofa or sawbwa did recognize that their status as hereditary rulers was anachronistic. The coming generation of Shan, particularly those educated and the urbanites, no longer accepted the princes' hereditary right to rule. There was also the need to regularize and standardize the administration and to provide the Shan with a single focus of unity and loyalty. The princes had therefore begun in 1952 the process of surrendering their power to the Shan government at Taunggyi, and this was completed and finalized in a ceremony at Taunggyi in 1959 which General Ne Win attended as head of the care-taker government (1958-60). In effect, the princes surrendered their hereditary powers not to the "Union" government, and not because they were forced to by Ne Win's caretaker government. They surrendered power to the Shan government at Taunggyi, and thus to the Shan people, and they did so because it was time to do so. The division of the Shan State into more than two dozen principalities was clearly no longer viable or practical.

The Burman military however took credit for "ending feudalism" in the Shan State, and has also attributed the armed peasant uprising in 1959, and the later Federal movement to the dissatisfaction of the princes over the loss of princely powers.²⁷ From the Shan point of view however, both the uprising and the Federal movement were reactions to the highhandedness of the Burman military and the ill-discipline of the Burman soldiery.²⁸ Moreover, the Federal movement, in particular, had nothing to do with the loss of princely powers. Rather, it was an attempt not only by the Shan but by all the non-Burman components of the "Union" of Burma to redress certain imbalances in the constitution so that rebellions could be contained or prevented, and the country made stronger and more united. It was reasoned and hoped that a genuine federal structure would, among others, take away from the military the extra-legal and extra-constitutional powers it exercised in the non-Burman homelands. The aggressive penetration of the Burman-dominated Burma Army into the hinterland of the non-Burman homelands was causing serious and grave problems, in particular where it concerned the relationship between the Burman military and the non-Burman populace in the rural areas. The unwillingness of the Burman military to recognize or acknowledge the grievances suffered by the peasantry, and the inability of state governments and leaders to curb or prevent the army's excesses aggravated the situation further. Finally, as the 1950s ended, the Shan and Kachin peasants resorted to armed resistance against what they perceived of as an oppressive army of occupation. The Federal movement was, then, an attempt by non-Burmese leaders to work out a solution to the problems troubling them, i.e., the uprising by the peasants against the army and the extra-legal power exercised by the Burman military. They turned to U Nu who had won a landslide electoral victory in 1960 on an anti-military platform. He was apparently the only Burman leader who would be capable of not only keeping the Union together but also of curbing the growing power of the Burman military. It would not be out of place to say that there was nothing further from the minds of the Shan princes and other leaders than taking up arms to dismember the country or plotting secession as alleged by the 1962 coup-makers. The leader of the Federal movement, Chao Shwe Thaik, the Yawngwe prince, was after all, not the average hot-headed revolutionary but a senior statesman and the first Union

President, much respected by both the Burman and the non-Burman alike. Moreover, all non-Burman civil servants in the various state governments supported the movement and viewed it as a normal constitutional and political process, as working within the system and within bounds of accepted procedures to bring about desired changes and to solve fundamental problems. This important point has somehow and inexplicably been overlooked by outside observers of the politics of Burma.

Now we come to the question of "keeping the country together" which is the only positive thing scholars have been able to credit the Burman military with. This credential is however of dubious validity on two counts. In the first place, there was no attempt by anyone to dismember the Union in 1962. As pointed out earlier, the Federal movement was a legitimate and legal constitutional process aimed more at strengthening the Union than at fragmenting it. Secondly, it is neither here nor there to speak of the Burman military "keeping the country together" when it is obvious that military rule, since 1962, has not brought about any greater national cohesion or any benefit for the country or the people as a whole. The havoc and ruin brought upon the country by the Burman military is too well known, and has been commented upon, reported, and documented by scholars, journalists, and even travel writers and tourists to need any elaboration here. Rather than "keeping the country together" in any meaningful sense of the words, military rule in Burma has, in a very serious way, damaged whatever political links there were between the various ethnic components of Burma, more so since the military has so far refused to allow its own creation, the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP), to play the role it was intended for. As things now stand, the BSPP is but a meaningless ceremonial facade and has yet to be activated as a political arena and as a ruling party. By not allowing the BSPP to become a genuine political vehicle, the Burman military has effectively cut off all channels of communication with the non-Burman and closed the door to meaningful participation in national affairs. And by insisting on the total submission of the non-Burman and the unconditional surrender of their identities and culture, the Burman military has consequently legitimized the politics of violence and thus legitimizing the status of rebel armies in the eyes of the various non-Burman population. As a result, the situation existing in the non-Burman states is a politically polarized situation with the Burman military on one end of the spectrum and the rebels on the other. There is a total absence of a moderate middle-of-the-road leadership which, if developed and nurtured, could defuse the rebellions, and eventually put into place a more acceptable and workable superordinate-subordinate relationship between the Burman and the others.

The key to greater integration, peace and unity in Burma is obviously the structuring of a more acceptable and workable superordinate-subordinate relationship within the polity as it is clear that that the Shan, Kachin, Karen and others do not aspire to a superordinate position. The bone of contention has never been the question of who should wield greater power at the center.²⁹ The Federal movement was, analytically, a proposal by the non-Burman for an adjustment of the terms of

subordination and superordination. Moreover, it is certain, inevitable even, that in a genuinely federal arrangement, the Burman would be required to play a larger role in national affairs than the non-Burman, and would lead the nation. Burma's problem of ethnicity and fragmentation, though a long-standing one, is in actual terms not unresolvable since neither ethnic competition nor ideological conflict is involved. It is more a problem stemming from misconceptions, unfounded fears, and above all, the lack of leadership skills of the Burman elites (both military and civilian, the former especially) than it is a problem of secession and separatism per se.

The solution to ethnic conflict and rebellion is theoretically within easy reach, but the main and most difficult hurdle to overcome is developing the political will for a political solution. That is to say, the Burman military elite can survive and remain in power indefinitely though it lacks internal control and internal legitimacy, because it certainly does not lack external legitimacy. Whatever its status is internally, the external legitimacy it enjoys provides the regime with access to foreign governments and international agencies enabling it to request and receive foreign loans, economic and military assistance, and as well, obtain goodwill and sympathy abroad and in international forums. External legitimacy has enabled the regime to mis-rule and mis-manage the affairs of the country since it is not required to do anything to win this kind of legitimacy except to be in physical occupation of the capital city. There is evidently no pressing need therefore for the Burman (military or) pseudo-civilian regime to make any internal adjustments, or to come to terms with those it has excluded from any voice in national affairs, be they Burmans or others. On the other side of the coin, precisely because the regime is seen as illegitimate and is politically bankrupt and unpopular, the various rebel armies will continue to enjoy the support of their respective people, and will fight on indefinitely in the manner they have carried on these two or three decades.

The purpose of this paper is not to predict Burma's immediate future, particularly the possible outcomes following the expected passage of the strongman, Ne Win, from the scene before very long. Nor is it the aim of this short paper to suggest solutions for the resolutions of the ethno-national conflict and the problem of national fragmentation in Burma. Its main object is rather to suggest to scholars and friends of Burma to re-think and to re-examine the assumptions and premises long held and on which they have based many of their observations and conclusions concerning the task of nation-building in Burma and the ethnic rebellion afflicting the country since independence in 1948. Perhaps it is now time for scholars and students to dissect the myths surrounding the political history of Burma and, as well, to bring Burma back into the real world.

13. Even at the end of WW II, memories were fresh among the Shan of the oppressive misrule of Burman kings and of the successful expulsion of the Burman from Shan soil (around 1860-1885).
14. R. Taylor, 'British Policy in the Shan State, 1886-1942'. Seminar paper, Payab College, Chiangmai, Thailand, 1983.
15. See Leach's The Political System of Highland Burma (1965) (paperback ed.); and Kunstader (ed.) S.E.Asia, Tribes, Minorities and Nations (1967), Princeton; Chapter on Burma, esp. Macan and Lehman.
16. Among others, R.H.Talyor, op cit. This allegation against the Shan chaofa is the standard political stick to flog the British and portray the princes as unpatriotic and disloyal. The Burman elites, the military especially, were incensed with the princes because they cabled London in 1947 stating that Aung San represented only Ministerial Burma, not the Frontier Areas. This indeed was a fact at the time.
17. The Americans and the British respectively organized Force 101 and Force 132 behind the Japanese lines. These forces were composed of non-Burman loyalists, and as the Burman nationalists collaborated with the Japanese, there was, as could be expected, some amount of anti-Burman feelings among the non-Burman groups.
18. The perception that the British encouraged anti-Burman tendency and separatism among the Burman as a matter of policy (i.e., the classical divide-and-rule strategy) has persisted though it is not grounded in facts. According to Taylor (op cit), the British were not at all pleased by the appeals of Shan princes in the 1930s against the future incorporation of their homeland within Burma. In general, the British were portrayed or perceived of as being prejudiced towards the Burman and highly sympathetic towards the Karen, Shan, Karenni, etc.
19. See Report of the Frontier Areas Commission of Enquiry (FACE), 1947, Rangoon. Very interesting and revealing of the supposed British sympathy for the "minorities". The Frontier Areas leaders and representatives were encouraged (duped?) to frankly express their feelings which they did because they trusted the British. The depth of the mistrust expressed by the people of the Frontier Areas for the Burman, and their fears and concern at the prospect of life under Burman rule apparently had no effect on the British, for these concerns and fears were simply ignored. It was, as goes a Shan saying, "tying the goat up for the tiger to devour".
20. Cady, op cit, pp.552-4.
21. The writer is not aware that the records of the Constituent Assembly of 1947 has ever been published, and has not come across any references made by scholars to the said records.
22. How the Karenni homeland came to be incorporated within the Union of Burma has not been accounted for. The Karenni area enjoyed a special status as a British protectorate.
23. See Resolution of the Steering Committee (Shan State) For the Amendment of the Constitution of the Union of Burma, 1961, Taunggyi, Shan State Government.
24. Among others, the Yawnghwe Mahadevi, widow of the Yawnghwe Prince (and 1st. Union President), and one time MP for Hsenwi (1956-8). The names of other Shan sources cannot be revealed for reason of their safety and well-being.
25. Here the writer differs with the Burman military and many foreign scholars and observers who see the last years of civilian rule, 1960-62, as a period of threats, dangers, near-collapse and so forth. The writer believes that despite the Federal movement, the squabbling among leaders of U Nu's Union party, the opposition by non-Buddhists to U Nu's initiative of making Buddhism the state religion, the rhetorics of leftist politicians and students, and the inflammatory tone of Rangoon's Burmese language newspapers, the country was in no danger of falling apart as alleged by

the coupmakers. There was no external dangers and no plots to dismember the country. If there were any foreign power interested in annexing the country, this could have been accomplished any time after the 1962 coup, and possible even now.

26. Among others, one of those brave souls who dared to complain openly about the Burma Army atrocities, Chao Kya Seng (the Hsipaw prince), was taken into military custody in 1962 (as were all princes, MPs, politicians, and even community and business leaders). He was however never heard from or seen again.

27. Unfortunately, even Dr. J. Silverstein who is sympathetic towards the non-Burman made such an allegation. See "Burma", Chp.2 of Smith (ed.) Southeast Asia: Documents of Political Development and Change (1965), London. p.122.

28. The ill-treatment accorded the non-Burman populace in their own homelands and the atrocities have as yet to be properly documented and published. However, among the Shan, Kachin, Karenni, and so on, these atrocities are taken as common everyday indignities and brutalities they have to put up with. The closing of the country to foreign journalists, scholars, and the limits imposed on travel affecting Rangoon-based diplomats indicates that the regime has much to hide. As of late however, because of the Karen-Burma Army fighting on the Thai border, the army's practice of forcibly taking villagers along as coolies and human shields into combat zones has been more frequently reported in the Thai press. This practice in itself is a form of atrocity and a grave human rights violation.

29. The matter of external legitimacy in the Third world polities and its great value to unpopular and repressive regimes has been underplayed and underestimated. Due to the ease by which any regime (particularly those set up by rebellious soldiers) is able to obtain foreign and international recognition, there is very little incentive for these regimes to strive for internal legitimacy or respect human rights and civil liberties. The question of internal legitimacy has become superfluous and a redundant political commodity. It would not be wrong to say that repression and disrespect for the rule of law on the part of rulers are, to a great extent, encouraged by the practice of the international community in according any regime its automatic recognition.

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