

Myanmar's Emergence against the Backdrop of the Changing International Political Landscape

- I. Thank you, great honour to be invited to speak, fear I have nothing new that such a distinguished audience does not already know
- II. Topic is Myanmar's emergence against the backdrop of the changing international landscape
 - A. This is a very broad topic, so break it down
 - B. 'Myanmar's emergence'
 - 1. In some ways a misconception
 - 2. Myanmar emerged as an independent state in the Westphalian system on 4 January 1948
 - 3. It adopted neutralism and non-alignment as key foreign policy principles
 - a. Differentiate neutralism and non-alignment
 - b. Myanmar joined no alliance so non-aligned
 - c. Myanmar has been neutral on non-core issues of adjoining states
 - d. But not neutral on issues such as
 - i. The one China policy
 - ii. The peaceful settlement of disputes

- iii. The principle of non interference in the domestic affairs of states
- 4. Independent Myanmar's foreign policy has gone through several analytically distinctive phases
 - a. 1948 – 1952 or 1953, civil war and learning about the international system
 - i. PVO's wanting to declare war on the USA and UK
 - ii. Korean War
 - iii. KMT and Chinese nationalists
 - iv. British Services Mission and the civil war
 - v. This period clearly showed the links between international politics and domestic politics
 - vi. Lessons were learned then that led to decisions being taken later, especially after 1962
 - b. 1953 to 1962, trying to mediate the cold war while shoring up bilateral relations in a hostile world under primarily the religiously inspired policies of U Nu
 - i. Improved relations with China
 - ii. High noon of the non-aligned movement
 - c. 1962 to 1988, autarky and withdrawal under U Ne Win, being left alone

- d. 1988 to 2011 or 2012, developing bilateral relations with major Asian powers, China and India primarily, and warding off the West's hostility
 - i. Joining ASEAN
 - ii. Joining SAARC and BIMSTec
 - iii. Getting close to China
 - iv. Renewing relations with Russia
 - e. 2012 onwards, being courted by seemingly everyone as the next democracy and next economic tiger of Asia
5. Myanmar has not so much emerged as been finally accepted by the West, meaning the USA and its primary European and antipodean allies, after the misunderstood events of 1988-90, thus changing the dynamics of existing bilateral and, to a lesser extent, multilateral, relationships
- a. Usual reason given is the reforms implemented by the Thein Sein government
 - b. This perhaps provides the cover but other things are at stake
 - c. Key issue may be American desire for a free trade agreement with ASEAN is much more important for US trade and investment than either China or India

- i. Such an agreement is part of the so-called ‘pivot’ to Asia and the desire to keep South East Asia out of the clutches of China
 - ii. Americans clearly see China as a threat to their interests
 - iii. Whether it is or not, and for how long, is rarely asked in Washington
 - iv. Pressed by Singapore and others to balance China as concerned that success of Chinese economy will absorb South East Asia
 - d. Also, fear that China is getting too powerful in east Asia
 - e. And concern for America’s primary Asian ally, Japan
 - f. And concerns about North Korea and nuclear proliferation
 - g. Whatever the case, need to note that the so-called emergence of Myanmar demonstrates the power of the US government in setting the English-language media agendas of the Western world and thus the rest of the world
- C. By changing international landscape, mean the rise in power of China and India, as well as the formation and attempted strengthening of multilateral institutions, particularly ASEAN, and the relative decline in power of the United States and the countries of Western Europe

1. Part of the general shift in power and wealth from the West to South and East Asia during the period since Myanmar regained independence, especially in the 1990s and beyond
 2. Greatly accelerated by China since the advent of the economic policies of Deng Xiaoping
 3. And India's increasing, but still limited, opening to foreign trade and investment, and adaption of new technology
 4. And, in relative terms, effected by the greying of US and European populations, the hollowing out of Western industrial production, and changing patterns of consumption
 5. None of this was thought possible when Myanmar first emerged in 1948
 6. As it hypothetically re-emerges from the Burma Socialist Programme Party era, and the Western imposed sanctions regime of the SLORC/SPDC era, Myanmar is seen to face the challenge of economic catch up
- D. The changing international landscape is normally discussed in terms of economics
1. As Thant Myint-U does in his much noted *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia*
 2. But one must not forget that while international politics may be underpinned by economics

3. Economics is not the sole determinant of foreign policy
4. You can argue that economics – oil – was the basis of the second world war in Asia
 - a. When President Roosevelt placed an embargo on Japanese supplies from American companies in the Dutch East Indies
 - b. As the Japanese do
 - c. But that ignores the war in China and the pattern of Japanese foreign and imperialist policies since it became a recognised power after the First World War
 - d. Rise of Japanese militarism and search for food

III. Foreign policy and foreign relations are composed of many drivers besides economics

- A. Recent concentration on economics is the result of the changes in power relations which the economic growth of Asia has generated
- B. It is the changes in power that is crucial
- C. Recent concentration on economics – and human rights -- is also a result of the end of the Cold War
- D. And the mistaken belief that ideology as a divider in the structures of nation's politics and foreign policies
- E. Ideology is very much alive but cloaked behind a Western push for 'universal values' and the hyperbole of 'globalisation'

F. Neoliberal ideology against state centric development strategies

also an ideological argument not too different from the cold War - puts Japan, China and Europe against USA and Great Britain

G. The emphasis on human rights is also part of the conflict over

economic strength as the growth of human rights is seen as a way of making countries less economically competitive by increasing production costs to Western levels

IV. State or National Power in International Relations, as Hans

Morganthau – grand old man of realist or power politics international relations -- reminded us, is composed of a number of components.

These are

A. Geography

1. About which no state can do much
2. Myanmar's position between India and China determines much of what its posture can be
3. 1990 Malaysian conference – Myanmar emerging as a bridge, bridges are things you walk on
4. Just as the distance from the United States makes its interests much less pressing on Myanmar than those of India or China
5. China and India talk about Geography at the regional
6. The USA talks about GEO Politics at the global level

B. Natural resources including food and raw materials including energy

1. Here is one of Myanmar's advantages, thanks to General Ne Win leaving the natural gas in the ground and under the sea
2. Also poses one of the huge dilemmas for the country in developmental terms
3. Danger of become Nigeria, not South Korea

C. Industrial capacity

1. China's great strength
2. India not really competing in the same areas
3. US of course paramount in technological innovation

D. Military preparedness including

1. Technology
 - a. China and India playing catch up with the USA
 - b. USA only country with global power projection capabilities today, only superpower
2. Leadership – an imponderable
 - a. All have their scandals
 - b. All have their geniuses
3. Quantity and quality of armed forces
 - a. Here the Americans always point to China as a threat
 - b. Similar build up in India from a smaller economy

E. Population

1. Size

- a. China, 1.4 billion and aging
- b. India, 1.2 billion and growing
- c. These two account for 37 per cent of the world's total population
- d. Myanmar, 60 million and growing
- e. United States, 315 million and growing
- f. Japan, 127 million and aging
- g. United Kingdom, 63 million and growing

2. Trends

F. National Character -- ????

G. National Morale -- ?????

H. Quality of diplomacy -- ????

I. Quality of government -- ????

J. These last four are value judgements better made by historians than predictors of the future

K. While these may be the basis of a state's relative power, and these can and do change over time, ideas – or ideology – and institutions – or bureaucracy --also play a crucial role in international politics

V. Henry Kissinger published an article in 1966 entitled 'Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy' which it is useful to reflect upon in

terms of the current international politics surrounding the place of Myanmar vis-à-vis China, India and the United States

A. Kissinger is not my favourite person and the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to him in 1973 raises some doubts about the reasons for which the award is made

B. But leaving that aside, his 1966 article raises some interesting points

C. Written in the midst of the cold war, it makes the point that finding diplomatic solutions to international conflicts is more difficult when the domestic structures of states are different and based on conflicting principles of state craft

D. One of his points is that the ability of a state to mobilise resources is a function of its political system and some political systems are better at that than others

1. Kings ruling through patron-client structures could not conscript populations and impose income taxes but republics can
2. He makes the point that so-called totalitarian states can mobilise resources more greatly than so-called democracies
3. Difference between the strength of states and the strengths of societies – Myanmar Kings and British state

- E. He also makes the point that how states are structured determines how they interpret the actions of other states – what they conjecture to be the motive or cause of a rival or allies action
- F. Kissinger then states that a complete assessment of this problem would require a systematic assessment of
1. The historical traditions of a state
 2. The social values of a society
 3. And the economic system of a state
- G. However, he limits his discussion to two other aspects
1. The administrative structure of a state
 2. The formative experience of leadership groups
- H. I want to suggest to you that in looking at the current international scene and Myanmar's place in it, it would be advisable to examine the administrative structures of states and the formative experience of leadership groups in order to assess what kinds of actions they might undertake
- I. Also one needs to examine the ideological views of leaders who are probably representative of the views and values of the larger political society in order to understand better current and potential international conflicts
- J. Undertake this in two different ways, following in part Kissinger's insights

- VI. Kissinger's implicit point was that during the cold war ideologically incompatible world views were being advanced by the United States and the Soviet Union
- A. The question today, after the end of the cold war and the fall of the Berlin Wall, is do the United States, China and India wish to establish their world view or ideological values on the rest of the world
1. I would suggest that the United States does
 2. But that India and China do not
 3. The US programme of assistance to Myanmar announced by President Obama last November demonstrates this point
 4. If Chinese Communist was ever expansionist, it certainly is not now
 5. And India is content to live with non-elected neighbours and has no desire to impose its political system on others
 6. This makes the United States the potential ideological power in this era, with no countervailing power to contest the imposition of American political values after the fall of the Soviet Union
 7. Hence the so-called Asian Values debate on the 1990s by Lee Kuan Yew and Dr. Mahathir Mohammed

B. Institutionally, the foreign policy bureaucracies of India, China and the United States provide differing models of politics and decision making, including the careers and backgrounds of decision makers

1. In China, one rises through the ranks of the Communist Party
 - a. Gradual progress, keeping one's nose clean, and not rocking the boat, are keys to success
 - b. Being flamboyant and publicly political are frowned upon
 - c. The Party and the State have their own bureaucracies for creating policy choices
 - d. The old party tie is quite important for new elites evolving from the revolutionary generation
2. In India, the process of rising to power and the making of policy is also linked closely with elite politics
 - a. Not really studied much, but the foreign ministry seems to have a relatively free standing position in terms of public opinion and the legislative process
 - b. The change of policy toward Myanmar in the 1990s seemed to have resulted from considerations made at the top of the government, in which economics trumped other considerations

- c. Indian political parties and bureaucracies also operate very much on their own, perpetuating powerful families and generating stability
3. The United States has a rather more open political and bureaucratic system, generating greater instability in policy making
- a. Businessmen and lawyers dominate
 - b. Rival bureaucracies compete for the President's ear
 - c. Individuals pop in and out of think tanks and universities between regimes, politicising political analysis and distorting world views
 - d. Military also has a large input into foreign policy with the web of more than 850 US military bases around the world plus the various commands such as Cincpac
 - e. The media plays a role also publicising the current dogma from which it is difficult to dissent
 - f. But the President and the government can, after creating a consensus within the political elite, change policy, as has happened with Myanmar

C. Why are these different kinds of elite and decision making institutions important for considering Myanmar and the changing international landscape?

1. Because the nature of regimes effects political stability and policy continuity
2. India and China are more likely to pursue stable policies and conduct predictable foreign policies
3. The United States is more likely not only to be ideological in its foreign policy intentions, but also unpredictable
 - a. Not only because of periodic elections
 - b. But because of the porous nature of the political system
 - c. Failure of appreciate the nature of American politics can lead to mistakes in policy, as occurred in Myanmar when George Bush was elected in 2000
4. Situation that the world finds itself in is rather like that of 19th century Europe, as Kissinger noted
 - a. Britain had a stable political elite and therefore cautious and consensual politics and policies toward Europe
 - b. Germany, with a powerless legislature, and an unstable government, had an adventurous foreign policy, leading to continental wars

VII. In trying to predict how states will behave in the future, it is interesting to note the notions of national doctrine and the use of history in shaping foreign policy

A. China and India have their doctrines of war and relations such as

Sun Zi's THE ART OF WAR and Kautilya's ARTHASHASTRA
or science of politics

1. Both advocate both active and passive defence and offence
2. And warn of the dangers of war in terms of being unpredictable
and likely to lead to changes of regime or leadership

B. The American doctrines of war and international relations are
much more messianic

1. America as the last hope of mankind
2. America as possessing manifest destiny and a global ideological
mission
3. American's do not take history as seriously as Indian and
Chinese policy makers
4. American arrogance is sometimes matched by other countries'
arrogance but rarely exceeded

C. If past behaviour is any kind to future international behaviour, then
China and India are not really threats to Myanmar, whereas the
United States might be

1. Both China and India have projected power beyond their
borders sparingly in the past few decades

- a. After the creation of Bangladesh and intervention in Sri Lanka, India restrained in its wars with Pakistan and conflicts with China
- b. Similarly, after the rise of Deng, China has used military power little
- c. The two countries have remarkably similar records in terms of the use of force in diplomatic relations during the past few decades
- d. Of course, Kashmir and Taiwan are key and vital interests to the respective regimes
- e. The legitimacy of the regimes depend on the defence of these core interests

2. Whereas the United States has been more or less continuously at war in the Balkans and the Middle East the past three decades

VIII. In terms of the near future for Myanmar in terms of the changing power relationships among China, India and the United States, economic interests will be paramount

A. China's need for markets for the goods its factories produce and raw materials and energy shape its policies

1. The new leadership has emphasised economic growth and further integration into the world economy

B. India also needs these things

1. But the political system lacks the capacity for quick decisions
 2. And existing vested interests have the power to slow down, if not stop, India's economic integration into the Western driven global economy
- C. The USA has a desire to spread its economic interests and power and networks and curiously, given the American suspicions about China, China is more working in the US interest than India
- IX. In terms of power politics, the current changes in the dynamic are in terms of the United State's return to South East Asia following the debacle of the Bush/Blair years in the middle east
- A. This brings American interests in line with those of Australia and Japan, key American allies in Asia
- B. It also plays to the perception in American policy circles that China is a potential enemy to the United States
- a. Despite the economic dependence of the two countries
 - b. This grows out of the Cold War and the American perception that one party states are a threat to American ideology
- C. As the media and academia do not study Indian events and interests as much as Chinese, the Americans have little understanding of India
1. And for ideological reasons, see India as a democracy and therefore OK

2. Despite often clashing economic and strategic interests such as protectism and Pakistan

X. So what does all of this mean for Myanmar

A. Lord Gore-Booth, former ambassador to Myanmar from the UK, wrote in his memoirs, “If the world will leave Burma alone, Burma can be one of the happiest places in the world.” Paul Gore-Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect*, p. 204.

B. But the world will not leave Myanmar alone

C. India and China see Myanmar as

1. A source of energy and raw materials
2. As a market for their goods and services
3. As an access point to the Indian ocean for China
4. As access to South East Asia for India
5. For access to each other by both
6. As troublesome because of the legacy of past relations, particularly in the border areas
7. Therefore both have reasons to be concerned about the direction of Myanmar’s domestic politics and foreign policy

D. The United States sees Myanmar primarily in terms of three factors of declining importance

1. As a point of competition with China and a route into the backyard of China

2. As proof of the validity of the American ideological vision that
American style democracy and American style consumer
capitalism are the wave of the future and the only way to
organise life
 3. As a place for investment in natural resources and the sale of
economic services and capital investment
- E. None will see Myanmar itself as worth fighting over
- F. But all will want to have influence and balance the others
- G. The myth that American and Indian interests are compatible in
Myanmar has not yet been exploded
- H. The myth that American and China interests are incompatible has
not also been tested
- I. I am normally an optimist, but I am not now optimistic that
Myanmar will remain the quiet and stable country that I remember
from the 1970s
- J. And while its people, or some of them, may get richer, I doubt if
they will get happier