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**NAVAL  
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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**BURMA/MYANMAR'S NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT  
FAILURES: WHY RESILIENCE AND LEVERAGE  
MATTER**

by

Glenda K. Pollard

December 2015

Thesis Advisor:  
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**BURMA/MYANMAR'S NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT FAILURES: WHY  
RESILIENCE AND LEVERAGE MATTER**

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Lieutenant Commander, United States Navy  
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS IN SECURITY STUDIES  
(FAR EAST, SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE PACIFIC)**

from the

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## ABSTRACT

Empirical research shows that nonviolent movements tend to be more effective than armed rebellion in influencing regime change, but in Burma (renamed Myanmar in 1989), the people failed twice in overthrowing the military-controlled government. The 1988 student-led movement had nationwide support and incapacitated the government but fell short of severing the military's control of the state. In 2007, the monk-led Saffron Revolution attracted greater international attention but had less domestic participation and crumbled under violent suppression. Using Kurt Schock's analytical framework for explaining the outcome of unarmed uprisings, which he describes in the 2005 *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*, this thesis analyzes both movements in Burma/Myanmar in terms of their resilience and leverage. The comparative case studies of these failed movements show that they were unsuccessful because they lacked resilience due to fragmentation and a lack of leadership, and they lacked leverage due to the regime's unity and its capacity to pursue an effective repressive strategy against the opposition. This study concludes that the regime's unshakable solidarity was the main reason for the movements' failure. Resilience is important for an unarmed uprising to amass support and build strength, but without leverage, its chance of succeeding is low.



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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABFSU	All Burma Federation of Students' Unions
ABMA	All Burma Monks Alliance
ABSDF	All Burma Student's Democratic Front
ABYMU	All Burma Young Monks Union
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BSP	Burma Socialist Programme Party
CRDB	Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Burma
CSO	civil society organization
FBC	Free Burma Coalition
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IRC	International Red Cross
MIS	Military Intelligence Service
MIT	Mandalay Institute of Technology
NCGUB	National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma
NGO	non-government organization
NLD	National League for Democracy
SEA	Southeast Asian
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SMO	social movement organization
SOE	state-owned enterprise
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
RIT	Rangoon Institute of Technology
RU	Rangoon University
UN	United Nations
USDA	Union Solidarity Development Association
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In Burma, a 1988 student-led protest over the killing of unarmed students by the riot police metamorphosed into a pro-democracy movement. The nonviolent uprising seemed to be on the verge of overthrowing the authoritarian regime when the military-backed leader, Ne Win, resigned and two subsequent regime-appointed leaders failed to end the nationwide demonstrations. For the Burmese citizens who harbored strong pent-up frustrations, only a pro-democracy leader would satisfy their ultimatum; however, an indiscriminate spray of bullets killed their aspirations as the military retook control, ended the mass protests, and renamed the state Myanmar. Similarly, in 2007, a monk-led protest over the removal of fuel subsidies and the regime's mistreatment of monks sparked another pro-democracy uprising, but again Myanmar's nonviolent movement failed to topple the military dictatorship. Unlike these movements in Burma/Myanmar, unarmed national struggles elsewhere in Southeast Asia and throughout the world succeeded in overthrowing the authoritarian governments. Why did the nonviolent pro-democracy movement fail in Burma in 1988 and then again in 2007? What prevented the unarmed protestors from ousting the authoritarian government? Have conditions changed in Myanmar since 2007 in ways that would increase the probability of success if another civilian uprising occurs? This thesis will conduct a comparative study of both failed attempts in order to understand the reasons for these failures.

## **B. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Whether violent or nonviolent, the ousting of a dictator stirs intense emotions of relief and a belief in a better future. While armed and unarmed struggles have successfully overthrown dictatorships, a comparison of "323 nonviolent and violent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006" reveals that unarmed uprisings are more effective than armed conflict in causing regime change, and the new populace-preferred



leadership tends to be less repressive.<sup>1</sup> Since nonviolent movements seem to be a potent force for political transformation, studying their outcomes will help identify conditions that led some to succeed and others to fail. In Burma, the 1988 nonviolent pro-democracy movement failed to overthrow the authoritarian regime as the military regained control, and almost two decades later, the military ended another civil uprising against the Burmese government.

Understanding why the nonviolent pro-democracy movements in Burma/Myanmar failed in 1988 and again in 2007 may help Burmese civil society and pro-democracy leaders avoid making the same mistakes if and when another nonviolent popular uprising occurs. Additionally, states concerned with human rights may provide better support to Myanmar's political opposition and the repressed population. Even states that are unconcerned with human rights violations, or simply prefer to avoid meddling in other states' internal affairs, may have a vested economic interest to readjust their support for the authoritarian regime to encourage changes that decrease the chances of mass protests and political instability.

Identifying the conditions that led to two failed nonviolent movements in Burma/Myanmar will be useful in analyzing the trajectory of unarmed uprisings that may occur again in Myanmar or in other non-democratic, military-dominated states. This thesis will add to the understanding of the outcomes of nonviolent movements in authoritarian states and contribute to the larger study on social movements.

### **C. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The review of literature on nonviolent movements reveals that the outcome of an unarmed uprising depends on the strength and unity of the movement against a repressive authoritarian government. A non-resilient movement that is unable to gain enough leverage to undermine the authoritarian regime's coercive power tends to fail. This review will focus on explanations for the failure of Burma's 1988 nonviolent movement since little literature exists on the failure of the 2007 movement. I will briefly discuss the

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<sup>1</sup> Maria J. Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict," *International Security* 33, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 15.

emergence of the literature on nonviolent movements to explain why nonviolent action has attracted scholarly attention, and then review the literature on Burma to understand the failure of its unarmed uprising.

## 1. Emergence of Nonviolent Movement Literature

Nonviolent action is a high-risk approach for civil society to use in pressuring an authoritarian regime to change. Gene Sharp, who is considered by some to be the “father of nonviolent struggle,” defines nonviolent action as a “general technique of conducting protests, resistance, and intervention without physical violence ... against determined opponents who are prepared to impose serious repression.”<sup>2</sup> It takes a tremendous amount of courage to openly challenge a powerful, armed, and violence-prone opponent without weapons or fortification. Yet, nonviolent national struggles gained momentum in the latter part of the 20th century and continued into the 21st century as civil society “challenged dozens of non-democratic regimes throughout the world” with several succeeding.<sup>3</sup> Some notable examples are the Philippines’ People Power revolution that overthrew a dictator in 1986 and South Africa’s struggle against apartheid that successfully ended in 1994.

With an increase in nonviolent movements, especially ones that succeeded, came an increase in literature as scholars attempted to understand the emergence and efficacy of nonviolent action. Sharp’s comprehensive work on nonviolent action, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, written in the 1970s, became a highly referenced source by scholars and activists because it “provided a breakthrough in the social scientific analysis of nonviolent resistance.”<sup>4</sup> For instance, his assertion that dissenters can cause political change through nonviolent action without reverting to armed conflict “despite the state’s superior coercive capacity” caught the attention of scholars, especially after the success

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<sup>2</sup> Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005), 547–48; Mairi Mackay, “Gene Sharp: A Dictator’s Worst Nightmare,” *CNN*, June 25, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Kurt Schock, “The Practice and Study of Civil Resistance,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, 3 (2013): 279.

<sup>4</sup> Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 38; Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).

of some nonviolent movements.<sup>5</sup> Charles Tilly, a renowned social movement theorist, began to recognize nonviolent action as a new repertoire of social movements, and Sydney Tarrow, another renowned theorist of social movements, expanded on Tilly's work referring to the "modern repertoire of collective action" as a "newly found power in movement."<sup>6</sup> Tarrow states that disruption (nonviolent action) is the most potent form of a contentious act in social movements because it "gives weak actors leverage against powerful opponents."<sup>7</sup> While it may be powerful, some unarmed national struggles failed—as seen in Burma. With the increase in research on nonviolent movements came an understanding of how nonviolent action against an indomitable foe succeeds or fails.

## **2. Literature Review on Burma**

As the literature on nonviolent movements increased, a small body of scholarly works emerged to explain the failure of Burma's 1988 nonviolent movement. The case studies are a comparison of Burma with either successful or other unsuccessful unarmed uprisings or as a standalone assessment of its failure. The scholars provide different perspectives (movement-oriented, state-centered, or opposition-oriented), but they each conclude that the movement failed because it was weak against a strong unified state that used unrestrained violence. In this section, I will summarize the literature's key findings on Burma.

### ***a. Leading Explanation***

Kurt Schock uses a movement-oriented approach to assess the success or failure of unarmed uprisings in six different authoritarian states, including Burma.<sup>8</sup> According to Schock, a nonviolent movement's success depends on its ability to remain resilient against repression in order to increase its chances of gaining leverage over a powerful opponent. He defines resilience as the "capacity of contentious actors to continue to

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<sup>5</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 38.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 7, 42.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>8</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*.

mobilize collective action despite the actions of opponents aimed at constraining or inhibiting their activities,” and leverage as the “ability of contentious actors to mobilize the withdrawal of support from opponents or invoke pressure against them through the networks upon which opponents depend on their power.”<sup>9</sup> For example, during the Philippines’ People Power movement, the anti-regime demonstrations lasted for almost three years despite Marcos’s attempts to end the challenge against his rule.<sup>10</sup> By remaining resilient, the unarmed uprising severed Marcos’s sources of support until he lost the capacity to maintain his hold on power.<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Burma’s 1988 unarmed protests withstood the dictatorship’s attacks for over two years but failed to undermine the regime’s sources of power to prevent the military assault that ended the nationwide demonstration.<sup>12</sup>

Schock attributes Burma’s nonviolent movement’s failure to its inability to remain resilient against repression and gain leverage over the military regime. According to Schock, the disunity of the student and elite movement leaders caused the movement to become unsustainable because it delayed the creation of an umbrella organization that could coordinate and unify the nationwide protests, hindered the formation of a parallel government to replace the dictatorship once it collapsed, and impeded the emergence of a single movement leader. Furthermore, Schock argues that President Ne Win’s suppression of dissent and implementation of an isolationist foreign policy sheltered Burma against external threats and influence. He explains that without key political or military elite defections, autonomous third-party support, and effective international pressure, the movement was unable to gain leverage. Instead, the authoritarian state prevailed and reinstated its repressive political environment.<sup>13</sup>

Schock’s assessment of nonviolent movements based on the criteria of resilience and leverage is useful in analyzing movement outcomes. His analytical framework helps

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<sup>9</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 142–43.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 68–79.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–90.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv; 102–15.

assess the influence of repeated “interactions between challengers and opponents” and “interdependence of the polity and society in the national sphere and the interdependence of states and also nonstate actors in the transnational sphere” on a movement’s outcome.<sup>14</sup> His study shows that movement leaders play a direct part in sustaining mobilization, but as for leverage, the leaders may have to depend on actors outside the movement to help weaken the regime. For example, without influential military officers willing to disobey the dictator’s orders to attack unarmed protestors, the movement will more than likely fail. Additionally, while the international community may choose to support the movement, its ability to tip the balance in favor of the demonstrators depends on the regime’s susceptibility to international influence. Unarmed uprisings are complex events and the numerous factors that cause failure are unique to each situation. This literature review will apply Schock’s criteria to the related literature on Burma’s nonviolent movement to test their usefulness as an analytical framework.

***b. Related Literature***

Other scholars who explain the success or failure of nonviolent movements do not use Schock’s terms of resilience and leverage, but the reasons they provide fall into one of those categories. Three other scholarly perspectives on Burma’s 1988 unarmed uprising identify the causes of the movement’s failure that are similar to Schock’s assessment. This section will review their findings.

Vince Boudreau’s historical analysis of three pro-democracy movements in Southeast Asia using a state-centered approach provides insight into the influence that a state’s repressive strategy against dissent ultimately has on social movement outcomes.<sup>15</sup> In his study, he explains that upon assuming power, the authoritarian regime’s initial action against public challenges to its authority sets the precedent for subsequent protests. Knowing how the state authorities will react, activists will take advantage of emerging opportunities and work around or overcome constraints to mobilize support while the

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<sup>14</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 142–43.

<sup>15</sup> Vince Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship: Repression and Protest in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

regime will “try to undermine or capture movement activities, discredit their lines of argument, interdict their connection to supporters, and eliminate opportunities for mobilization.”<sup>16</sup> According to Boudreau, without the “connection between isolated, disgruntled, or concerned members of the ruling coalition and social reformers and activists,” a pro-democracy movement tends to fail.<sup>17</sup> For example, in Burma, Ne Win “moved with swift and deadly violence against any open protest or dissent in the lowlands, driving resistance underground or to the country’s frontier-based insurgencies,” which kept the links between and among movement leaders and the public fragmented.<sup>18</sup> Additionally, by preempting dissent, he strengthened the unity and resolve of the ruling party, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), and decreased the likelihood of defections or loss of troop loyalty, which increased the regime’s ability to survive nationwide social unrest.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, in the Philippines, Marcos’s oscillation between suppressing dissent to permitting dissent created an environment that allowed and strengthened the connections between internal and external oppositional forces that led to key defections that caused his downfall.<sup>20</sup>

Boudreau attributes the failure of Burma’s pro-democracy movement to the effectiveness of the BSPP’s repressive strategy and the movement’s inability to erode the “state’s capacity for repression.”<sup>21</sup> After the 1962 military coup, Ne Win eliminated civil society and kept activists fragmented, the public submissive, ex-regime members secluded, and the military loyal.<sup>22</sup> He isolated the ruling party from domestic and international pressures and prevented “dissident discourse from gaining influence within the regime.”<sup>23</sup> By doing so, the authoritarian government remained unified against the

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16 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 1–2.

17 Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 35.

18 *Ibid.*, 4.

19 *Ibid.*, 12.

20 *Ibid.*, 9; 239.

21 *Ibid.*, 251.

22 *Ibid.*, 245.

23 *Ibid.*, 244.

intense pressure from the unarmed uprising, and the movement was unable to disarm the military and end the dictatorship.

Despite having a different analytical perspective than Schock, Boudreau comes to the same conclusion that the movement was unable to undermine the regime.<sup>24</sup> Applying Schock's criteria to Boudreau's assessment reveals that the regime's actions had a greater impact on the movement's leverage than its resilience. The BSPP played direct and indirect roles in hindering the movement from gaining an upper hand. Prior to the emergence of the nonviolent movement, Ne Win's purges and suppression of dissent lessened the possibility of defections from the ruling party and minimized the impact of external pressures on it. Once the movement began, the ruling party used violence to force the populace to return to their homes, but the killing of unarmed civilians and beating of monks triggered mobilization instead of stifling it. Ironically, when the regime chose to do nothing and withdrew the security forces from the streets, the movement became increasingly fragmented, and when the military returned, it successfully subjugated the unarmed protestors. The dictatorship countered the movement's resilience and maintained its leverage.

Similar to Boudreau, Dan Slater takes a historical perspective in analyzing nonviolent movements and non-movements in seven Southeast Asian (SEA) states, but instead of adopting a regime-centric view he focuses on society. In particular, he examines the evolution of communal elites and explains how the symbolic power of religion and nationalism influences movement mobilization and outcome. Slater defines communal elites as "society's primary possessors of nationalist and religious authorities" who may have the ability to either sustain or undermine an authoritarian government depending on whether they are politically connected or autonomous.<sup>25</sup> Slater found that when salient communal elites have sided with an authoritarian regime, "democratic protest has failed to emerge or has been suppressed with relative ease," but when autonomous and salient communal elites supported activists, the symbolic power of

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<sup>24</sup> Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*.

<sup>25</sup> Dan Slater, "Revolutions, Crackdowns, and Quiescence: Communal Elites and Democratic Mobilization in Southeast Asia," *American Journal of Sociology* 115, no. 1 (July 2009): 203.

religion and nationalism helped mobilize and sustain the pro-democracy movement.<sup>26</sup> For example, in the Philippines, instead of economic hardship and election grievances unifying the Filipinos against the regime, the symbolic power of the communal elites (Catholic Church and Corazon Aquino) appealed to Filipinos' nationalist and religious sentiment to forge a common identity to overthrow Marcos.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, Burma's military weakened the symbolic power of the sangha, a community of Buddhist monks, that supported the movement by attacking the monks who participated in the protests against the regime.

According to Slater, Burma's pro-democracy movement failed because even though the activists and the regime both possessed nationalist symbolic power, the regime had greater coercive power to maintain its authority. Since taking control of the state in 1962, the Tatmadaw, the military, has asserted that as protectors of the state, it is the rightful ruler, but the university students have repeatedly challenged that right since Aung San, Burma's revered national hero and military commander, was a student leader when he initially led the struggle for Burma's independence.<sup>28</sup> Slater explains that during every protest, students carried portraits of Aung San to emphasize their nationalist identity, and they have "often gained substantial societal support."<sup>29</sup> In the 1988 nonviolent movement, the protesting students received additional symbolic power from the sangha, who incited religious sentiment by joining the protests, and from Aung San Suu Kyi, Aung San's daughter, who inflamed nationalist sentiment by advocating for regime change.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, the Tatmadaw's entrenched belief with "its own nationalist purpose" to protect the state strengthened its solidarity, and it quelled the unarmed uprising without hesitation.<sup>31</sup>

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26 Slater, "Revolutions, Crackdowns, 220.

27 Ibid., 206.

28 Ibid., 241.

29 Ibid., 242.

30 Ibid., 244.

31 Ibid., 240.



Slater's assessment of the communal elites' weakness and the regime's strength is similar to Boudreau and Schock's analysis. The nationalist and religious communal elites had less influence in Burma than in the Philippines and other countries in the region. They had the power to mobilize an uprising and sustain it for a short time, but they were unable to weaken the authoritarian government or prevent the security forces from using force against them. The sangha was only partially autonomous in Burma since some monks depended on the state for alms while other monks depended on the populace. According to Boudreau, Ne Win's attempt to control the sangha drove the activist monks underground.<sup>32</sup> Schock explains that the monks lacked sufficient autonomy because Ne Win implemented rules requiring the registration of monks and ordered the removal of dissident monks.<sup>33</sup> The students and Suu Kyi possessed nationalist symbolic power, but they had no connection to the regime to influence change. The communal elites in Burma contributed to the movement's resilience but had little impact on leverage. As Slater contends and other scholars attest, the weakness of the communal elites and the swift use of force by the regime contributed to the movement's lack of resiliency and leverage.

Kyaw Yin Hlaing also takes an opposition-oriented approach and analyzes the influence of Burma's civil society and social movement organizations (SMO) on the 1988 pro-democracy movement. According to Hlaing, a movement tends to begin informally when an opportunity arises to mobilize collective action, but for the movement to persist, it requires formal organizations for effective coordination and informal connections for flexibility. Hlaing blames the weakness of Burma's informal civil society groups for the failure of the nationwide protests and assigns fault to the bickering student leaders for hindering the emergence of an overall leader who was needed to unify the opposition groups and sustain the pressure against the authoritarian government. In a restrictive political environment, the informal network helped Burma's activists take advantage of the public's anger, use framing to mobilize society, and create SMOs for two nationwide anti-regime demonstrations; however, it was also the reason for the movement's downfall. Hlaing explains that the secret and informal civil society

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<sup>32</sup> Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 160.

<sup>33</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 110.

that existed during Burma's socialist era failed to effectively unite against the BSPP after mobilizing the public for the 1988 anti-regime movement. The mistrust and fighting over who would lead a coalition of SMOs among the informal civil society groups led to the breakdown of the movement as they lost control of the SMOs and the protestors. Once the military regime reasserted its power, it re-imposed the restrictive political climate and disbanded civil society organizations (CSO) to include previously permitted non-state controlled organizations and increased surveillance to wipe out any antigovernment activity.<sup>34</sup>

Hlaing's findings also fit within the categories of resilience or leverage as he identifies similar faults with the national struggle such as fragmented and disorganized student leaders that Schock and Boudreau describe in their assessments. Civil society's strength lay in its ability to overcome constraints and mobilize a nationwide challenge against the regime. In contrast, its ability to gain leverage was weak. By being underground, it was unable to forge connections with former political elites and military officers who could have helped create a parallel government and choose a national leader. Additionally, by being informal and secret, it had a difficult time in lessening the mistrust among student groups and leaders. While civil society succeeded in mobilizing the challenge against the regime, it failed to gain the leverage it needed in order to overthrow the dictatorship.

### **3. Summary**

The literature review reveals that various factors contributed to the resilience and leverage of Burma's nonviolent movement, but it was the degradation of the movement's resilience and the insurmountable challenge of gaining leverage that caused the movement to falter. Movement leaders and communal elites were effective in mobilizing people against the authoritarian government, but they were ineffective in sustaining the movement to overpower the regime. The student leaders were too fragmented to unify the nationwide protests, and the potential national level movement leaders (a former prime

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<sup>34</sup> Hlaing, "Burma: Civil Society Skirting Regime Rules," in *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space*, ed. by Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 405–12.

minister, ousted generals, and Suu Kyi) had their own agendas that also contributed to the movement's lack of unity. Since the monks were partially under state control, they were not immune from repression and were unable to influence regime defections and military desertions to help tip the balance of power towards the movement. International pressure or support was insignificant to have an impact on either the movement's resilience or leverage. The regime's repressive strategy proved to be effective in strengthening its solidarity and countering the national struggle against it. As the movement's resilience decreased, its chances of gaining leverage and overthrowing the authoritarian government diminished. Using Schock's criteria of resilience and leverage help operationalize the assessment of the movement outcome and capture the various causes of failure. This thesis will use his analytical framework to explain the failure of Myanmar's 2007 pro-democracy movement.

#### **D. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

Despite the different perspectives provided and the varying reasons given in the literature on the failure of the 1988 nonviolent movement, the scholars reach the same conclusion that the movement was unable to gain the necessary strength to effect regime change and the authoritarian government was willing to use unrestrained force to prevent its downfall. Will the reasons be the same for the 2007 case? Considering the criteria of resilience and leverage, there are two possible hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1:* Fragmentation of the leadership—due to weak internal organization and regime repression—undermined the nonviolent movement's resilience and led to its failure.
- *Hypothesis 2:* High levels of regime unity deprived the opposition from gaining leverage and led to the movement's failure.

#### **E. RESEARCH DESIGN**

I will use the comparative case study method to study the failures of the nonviolent movements in Burma/Myanmar in 1988 and 2007. More than one nonviolent movement occurring in a country against the same regime is rare, so Burma/Myanmar's failures offer an opportunity to assess a state during two different time periods under the same authoritarian regime. The sources for the thesis will be scholarly journals, non-

government organization reports, and newspaper articles. Additionally, I will review books on Burma/Myanmar's pro-democracy movements.

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## **II. BURMA'S 1988 NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT**

Burma's 1988 nonviolent movement was the first nationwide protest against the military regime since it took power in 1962. University students successfully galvanized the population to unite against the government, and though the movement gained momentum and support, it failed to gain the strength needed to overthrow the dictatorship. President Ne Win effectively purged dissent from inside the ruling party and weakened the threat from external opposition. The movement leaders' disunity that was caused by internal disorganization and government repression undermined the movement's resilience while the regime's unity deprived the opposition from gaining leverage and caused the unarmed uprising to fail. This chapter will give a brief history of the regime, the opposition groups, and their contentious interaction prior to the 1988 nonviolent movement. Then it will recount the nationwide demonstration and analyze the resilience and leverage of the movement.

### **A. PRE-1988 BACKGROUND OF THE REGIME AND ITS OPPOSITION**

After Burma's independence from British colonial rule in 1948, its democratic government lasted for about fourteen years before the military stepped in and permanently took state power. The Tatmadaw, the military, perceived the civilian government, which was plagued with internal rivalry, as being inept in dealing with the threats from several armed insurgent groups and in maintaining stability and control of the state. To prevent further deterioration of the country, General Ne Win ousted Prime Minister U Nu in 1962, reestablished law and order, and proceeded to consolidate power and eliminate opposition. He took over the economy by nationalizing major industries, banks, and private enterprises. Additionally, he formed the ruling Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), banned other parties, and placed universities, which were a historical source of political agitation, and the media under state control. Initially, the regime abolished the Buddha Sasana Council and severed the sangha's political connection to the state, but as the monks continued to thwart Ne Win's mandate to cease political activism and register with the state, he formed the National Sangha Mahanayak

Council in 1980 and established state authority over the sangha. Ne Win seemed to have implemented the necessary controls to stay in power.<sup>35</sup>

Within the BSPP and Tatmadaw, Ne Win purged any dissent. When Brigadier General Aung Gyi, Ne Win's trusted advisor and presumed successor, opposed the state's new economic policy, the dictator dismissed him.<sup>36</sup> He fired General Tin Oo, his defense minister, when the general disobeyed orders to suppress the 1974 funeral protest and he criticized the regime's socialist economic policies.<sup>37</sup> In 1976, when the secret police discovered an assassination attempt against Ne Win and other high-ranking party members, the dictator imprisoned Tin Oo and fourteen mid-career officers and executed Captain Ohn Kyaw Myint, who had planned the hit.<sup>38</sup> Ne Win also purged Tin Oo's supporters, expelled "more than 50,000 BSPP members and cadres," deposed forty-two central committee members, and forced the retirement of several army officers.<sup>39</sup> In 1983, he imprisoned Brigadier General Tin U, his devoted intelligence chief who was "considered Ne Win's heir apparent and...regarded as his adopted son," and purged the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) because the agency and Tin U had allegedly grown too powerful.<sup>40</sup>

Ne Win rotated army commanders through lucrative postings every six months, such as jobs in areas with jade mines and opium fields, to prevent officers from accumulating too much power and to also sustain their loyalty.<sup>41</sup> He permitted troops to freely loot villages to compensate for their low salaries, and by allowing "corruption and brutality within the army every soldier became part of the system and inherited a vested

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35 Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times: Traditions and Transformations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), 245–48, 253; Bertil Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle for Democracy*, 2nd ed. (London: White Lotus, 1990), 40.

36 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 40.

37 *Ibid.*, 54.

38 *Ibid.*, 54–55.

39 *Ibid.*, 55–56.

40 *Ibid.*, 65.

41 *Ibid.*, 57.

interest in maintaining the status quo.”<sup>42</sup> In addition, soldiers received free housing, high-quality education, the best health care, social mobility, and goods at below market rates.<sup>43</sup> To discourage defections, Ne Win had the MIS accumulate private information on military personnel, which “greatly contributed to the cohesiveness of Burma’s armed forces.”<sup>44</sup>

### **1. The Military Regime and the International Community**

The regime’s policy of autarky helped decrease foreign influence. The demonetization of the kyat, Burma’s currency, led to the departure of foreign investors.<sup>45</sup> Because of a poorly performing economy, the dictatorship continued to accept international aid but only if it was government-to-government assistance.<sup>46</sup> Ne Win ended foreign support from international non-government organizations (NGOs), such as the Asia Foundation and the Ford Foundation.<sup>47</sup> He also closed the American and British language training centers and suspended the U.S. government’s Fulbright Scholarship Program.<sup>48</sup> The BSPP severely restricted travel outside the state and limited visits by foreigners.<sup>49</sup> It expelled foreign correspondents from Burma and barred foreign journalist from entering the country; however, it allowed foreign news agencies that hired state approved, local correspondents and operated under the strict guidance of the state to stay in Burma.<sup>50</sup> To the detriment of the economy, the BSPP had successfully isolated the regime against foreign influence.

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42 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma’s Struggle*, 57–58.

43 David I. Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001), 74–76.

44 *Ibid.*, 74; Lintner, *Outrage: Burma’s Struggle*, 63.

45 Linnea M. Beatty, “Challenge and Survival: Political Resistance in Authoritarian Burma,” (PhD diss., George Washington University), 89.

46 *Ibid.*, 98.

47 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma’s Struggle*, 37.

48 *Ibid.*

49 Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 91.

50 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma’s Struggle*, 42.



## **2. The Military Regime and Activists**

Once in charge, Ne Win created a climate that discouraged unsanctioned civil organizations. His 1964 National Solidarity Act outlawed civil society organizations (CSOs) and replaced them with state-controlled associations, such as the Worker's Asiayone and Peasants' Asiayone, and permitted apolitical and unthreatening social and religious organizations, like the Young Buddhist Association.<sup>51</sup> The regime also had an "extensive network of neighborhood surveillance" and imprisoned "anyone criticizing the government or its policies."<sup>52</sup> Working within the restrictive political environment, students, teachers, lawyers, monks, and other professionals formed informal social groups disguising themselves as book clubs to avoid government surveillance and distributed anti-government pamphlets covertly while waiting for an opportunity to organize a mass demonstration.<sup>53</sup> The groups met in "monasteries, private homes, and other secret locations, rarely holding two meetings consecutively in the same place."<sup>54</sup> While the secret groups thrived, the state's prying eyes hindered them from coalescing into a larger and more effective CSO.<sup>55</sup>

## **3. The Military Regime and Students**

After the coup d'état in 1962, the students continually challenged the military's right to rule by leading, coordinating, or participating in anti-regime protests. Within a few months of Ne Win forcibly taking power, the students protested against the military takeover. In response, the security forces shot and killed several students, blew up the Student Union building (a "symbol of Burmese nationalism since the 1930s") at Rangoon University (RU), and the regime closed down campuses for four months to deter further

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51 Kyaw Yin Hlaing, *The State of the Pro-Democracy Movement in Authoritarian Burma* (Washington, DC: East-West Center Washington, 2007), 393–94.

52 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 104.

53 Hlaing, *State of the Pro-Democracy*, 395.

54 Ibid., 395–96.

55 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 87.

unrest.<sup>56</sup> Ne Win responded in a similar way to the 1974 oil field and railroad workers' strike over low wages, poor working conditions, and food shortages.<sup>57</sup> The military "fired indiscriminately on the workers" and killed twenty-eight and wounded eighty.<sup>58</sup> The regime arrested university students who participated in the strike and closed down schools for several months. After the BSPP reopened the campuses, the students led protests against the regime for neglecting to hold a proper state-level funeral to honor U Thant, the former United Nations (UN) Secretary General whom the Burmese highly respected, when his body arrived home from New York.<sup>59</sup> During the protests, they denounced military rule citing corruption, violation of civil liberties, and mismanagement of the economy.<sup>60</sup> The security forces arrested and violently attacked the protesting students and monks, and Ne Win closed the schools once again to dampen unrest.

The MIS attempted to curb political activism by placing "one spy on campus for every ten students," but the students remained undeterred.<sup>61</sup> In 1975, through their underground networks, the students secretly contacted laborers to coordinate a demonstration against the regime on the anniversary of the previous year's strike.<sup>62</sup> The security forces arrested 213 students and workers who had been camping out at the Shwedagon Pagoda a night before the anniversary march.<sup>63</sup> Instead of being deterred, other students and workers marched to Insein prison demanding the release of their classmates and colleagues who were being interrogated and tortured.<sup>64</sup> Upon their release from prison a few months later, some of the students began planning a demonstration for March 1976, but military intelligence agents discovered their plan and arrested about 130

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56 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 38; Win Min, "Burma: A Historic Force, Forcefully Met," in *Student Activism in Asia: Between Protest and Powerlessness*, ed. Meredith L. Weiss and Edward Aspinnall (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 185.

57 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 92–93.

58 Ibid.; Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 51.

59 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 52.

60 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 100.

61 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 86–87.

62 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 52.

63 Ibid.

64 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 101.

students at RU.<sup>65</sup> Each time an unarmed protest occurred, the regime successfully ended the unrest through arrests, violence, and campus closures. After 1976, a decade passed before another uprising occurred.

During protests, leaders emerged spontaneously but they soon became targets of regime suppression. The students' most experienced leader, Tin Maung Oo, surfaced during U Thant's funeral protest, and the regime executed him and imprisoned his family.<sup>66</sup> Since then, potential student leaders have avoided public attention as "state repression and informants drove all others to jail, exile, the grave, or underground."<sup>67</sup> In 1988, the students successfully instigated a nationwide nonviolent movement through their underground network and student leaders emerged but most covered their faces initially with handkerchiefs but later removed them as the movement grew.<sup>68</sup>

#### 4. The Military Regime and Monks

The military regime has had an antagonistic relationship with the sangha since the 1962 coup d'état. After the military took power, Ne Win, preferring a secular state, eliminated state religious laws that supported Buddhism and ended government subsidies to the sangha; however, he still wanted control over the monks.<sup>69</sup> When he attempted to make them register with the state, they refused to comply.<sup>70</sup> In 1965, the security forces "arrested more than 100" of about 2,000 monks who protested against state control.<sup>71</sup> As the sangha continued to challenge state authority, the regime dealt with the wayward monks violently. From 1970 to 1972, military troops, led by Sein Lwin, suppressed a group of militant monks, the Young Monks, in northern Burma.<sup>72</sup> Then two years later,

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65 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 53.

66 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 96–99.

67 Ibid., 93–94.

68 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's*, 73, 139.

69 Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *History of Myanmar since Ancient Times*, 250, 253.

70 Charles Kurzman, "Organizational Opportunity and Social Movement Mobilization: A Comparative Analysis of Four Religious Movements," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 3, no. 1 (1998), 39–40.

71 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 89.

72 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's*, 88.

security forces arrested and killed monks who were protesting with students over U Thant's improper memorial service.<sup>73</sup> The demonstration was the "first significant protest in ten years in which monks participated."<sup>74</sup> In 1978, the regime continued its attack against the sangha by imprisoning, torturing, or disrobing monks seen as violating their religious vows.<sup>75</sup> Fed up with the monks' resistance, the BSPP officially implemented state control a few years later in an attempt to increase its authority over the sangha.

In 1980, Ne Win appointed General Sein Lwin (who became known as the Butcher of Rangoon because of his indiscriminate use of violence against unarmed protestors) to convene the First Congregation of All Orders for the Purification, Perpetuation and Propagation of Sasana.<sup>76</sup> Sein Lwin, with the assistance of "more than 1,000 senior monks" formed a hierarchical organization for the sangha.<sup>77</sup> They created the state-controlled Supreme Sangha Council, assigned retired military officers to handle the financial affairs of the abbeys, and established village, township, city, and district level government-appointed sangha councils.<sup>78</sup> Ne Win held senior abbots responsible for controlling the behavior of their monks and preventing the monasteries from becoming "havens for political activist, as they had been so many times before in Burmese history."<sup>79</sup> Despite the intimidation, violent attacks, and imposition of state control, the regime and senior abbots have been unsuccessful in preventing the "country's hundreds of thousands of monks" from joining the student-led 1988 nonviolent movement.<sup>80</sup>

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73 Bruce Matthews, "Buddhism under a Military Regime: The Iron Heel in Burma," *Asian Survey* 33, no. 4 (Apr., 1993), 414.

74 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 100.

75 "The Resistance of the Monks: Buddhism and Activism in Burma," *Human Rights Watch* (September 2009), 41.

76 Ibid.

77 Kurzman, "Organizational Opportunity," 40.

78 Stephen McCarthy, "Overturning the Alms Bowl: The Price of Survival and the Consequences for Political Legitimacy in Burma," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62, no. 3 (September, 2008), 300.

79 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 64.

80 "Resistance of the Monks," 43.

## 5. The Military Regime and Internal Opposition

Ousted political elites who opposed the authoritarian regime and joined the 1988 pro-democracy movement were powerless against Ne Win. After fleeing to Thailand upon his release from prison in 1966, Former Prime Minister U Nu formed a government-in-exile to gain support from the international community in overthrowing the regime.<sup>81</sup> The presence of MIS' secret informers among the "politicized Burmese exiles" caused paranoia and mutual suspicions, which "neutralized [the exiles] as a political force."<sup>82</sup> When Ne Win offered amnesty to the political outcasts and prisoners in 1980, U Nu returned to Burma because the financial support for his cause had dwindled.<sup>83</sup> After his release from prison, former Defense Minister Tin Oo pursued a law degree and waited until the nonviolent movement in 1988 to oppose the regime.<sup>84</sup> Ne Win's former trusted advisor, Aung Gyi, whom the BSPP allowed to set up a tea and pastry franchise in Rangoon, began to write open letters to Ne Win in 1987 when he sensed the public's growing anger.<sup>85</sup> He warned the dictator about the dangers of mismanaging the economy and of attacking students, and he encouraged the regime to pursue reform.<sup>86</sup> As the 1988 nonviolent movement gained momentum, he joined the other previously deposed political elites to support the public's effort to end military rule.

While Suu Kyi may have helped increase support for the nonviolent movement, her influence was limited since she had been out of the country most of her life. In 1960, she went to New Delhi with her mother, Khin Kyi, who was Burma's ambassador to India. Her mother returned to Burma after the completion of her ambassadorship while Suu Kyi married and lived with her British husband in Bhutan, Britain, and other countries. While in Bhutan in the 1970s, she gained experience in politics by advising the state's foreign affairs minister on UN matters. Suu Kyi periodically visited Khin Kyi in

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81 Boudreau, *Resisting Dictatorship*, 92; Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *History of Myanmar*, 249.

82 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 63.

83 Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *History of Myanmar*, 253.

84 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 64, 116.

85 *Ibid.*, 64.

86 *Ibid.*, 67, 71.

Burma but then returned for a longer stay in 1988 to take care of her ailing mother. She had no intention of becoming involved in the nonviolent movement that had been gaining momentum throughout the country until she learned of the regime's indiscriminate killings of unarmed protestors during a nationwide demonstration held in early August.<sup>87</sup>

## **B. 1988 UPRISING: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

The 1988 nonviolent movement developed from heightened tension that arose in 1987 between the regime and the public over demonetization of the kyat that wiped out people's savings. The students rioted when they were unable to pay their tuition because of the devalued currency, and the BSPP responded by closing the universities for about two months. Nevertheless, tensions remained high across the country and sporadic unrest continued. Even Burmese exiles sensing potential unrest formed the Committee for Restoration of Democracy in Burma (CRDB) and waited on the Thai border for an uprising to occur. The Burmese people seemed to be united in their aim to topple the regime; however, they were disjointed.<sup>88</sup>

In March 1988, Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT) students demanded justice after the police released the son of a highly connected local political authority after he was arrested for beating a university student. When the local officials ignored their ultimatums, student protests intensified until the riot police responded with brutal force that culminated in several students' deaths. Realizing the students' anger was unabated, the BSPP decided to take preemptive action and ordered the security forces to attack the RIT students to deter further unrest. Instead of suppressing the unrest, the violence increased student solidarity across Rangoon.<sup>89</sup>

To show their support for the RIT students, the RU students peacefully marched to RIT shouting for democracy. Before reaching the RIT campus, the military and riot police surrounded the students near Inya Lake on the "White Bridge" and brutally beat the marchers and drowned a few in the lake as they tried to escape. When the attack was

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<sup>87</sup> Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 108–09.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 67–68.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 2–4.

over, bodies were taken away and fire trucks washed the bloodstained streets to remove any evidence of government assault. Nevertheless, the news of the violence spread increasing the public's anger.<sup>90</sup>

To help dampen the heightened emotions, the BSPP hired a commission to investigate the murder of the first student. The students viewed the gesture as a sign of weakness and a partial victory, and their determination increased to end the dictatorship. To improve their organization, the students developed a campus communication network with other schools and sought the advice of former students who had experience demonstrating against the government. Once again, the ruling party took the offensive and attacked RU, and once more, the assault increased the students' resolve and sparked nationwide outrage.<sup>91</sup>

As the interaction between the regime, security forces, and students increased, other sectors of society began to join the protest in March. Prior to the August 8 nationwide general strike, the students' demanded the government provide justice for the student shootings and reveal the truth about the killings. As the protest grew in momentum, their ultimatum shifted to replacing the BSPP with a democratic government, and they began shouting anti-regime slogans that attracted support from more and more people and transformed the protests into a pro-democracy movement. Monks, factory workers, disgruntled citizens with financial or other past grievances, and the unemployed joined the student protests, and the unrest began to grow outside of Rangoon.<sup>92</sup>

Realizing the students' steadfastness and the public's undiminished anger, Ne Win resigned as president and party chairman in July and encouraged the BSPP to consider a multi-party system, which they rejected. Instead, they appointed General Sein Lwin, the Butcher of Rangoon, as president and chairman, which infuriated the populace. The underground groups expanded their informal networks they had previously built and used word of mouth, pamphlets, and BBC and Voice of America radio stations to

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90 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 5–6.

91 Ibid., 7–12.

92 Ibid., 10; Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 94.

coordinate a nationwide protest for August 8. They convinced bar associations, monasteries, and other religious, community, and professional associations to become social movement organizations (SMOs) and also helped form about 200 local strike committees throughout the state. Ne Win's resignation and radio broadcasts about international support for the movement encouraged previously reluctant citizens to join the anti-regime protests. On August 8, the different segments of society coalesced and held a nationwide strike. The military fired into protesting crowds killing between one thousand and three thousand demonstrators, but instead of ending the protests, sporadic and smaller sized demonstrations continued resulting in Sein Lwin resigning on August 12. The party, seemingly attempting to placate the public, appointed a moderate civilian president, Dr. Maung Maung, but the unarmed protestors refused to accept the compromise.<sup>93</sup>

Protests occurred in over forty locations throughout Burma with the involvement of thousands of people. Anti-regime supporters consisted of lawyers, writers, film actors, singers, and even some personnel from the civil service, the military, the police, and the ruling party. The demonstrators used barricades to impede movement of armed vehicles and troops. Lawyers, doctors, and nurses publicly condemned the regime's violent actions, and the surviving members of the Thirty Comrades attempted to persuade soldiers to defect. Many people refused to work and defied the government-imposed curfew. Thousands of BSPP members quit the political party while several other people went on hunger strikes. As the demonstrations continue to grow, air and rail transportation came to a standstill.<sup>94</sup>

Elite opposition began to speak out against decades of repression and economic mismanagement. Former Brigadier General Aung Gyi, who previously supported the regime, wrote open criticizing letters to Ne Win calling for economic and political reform.<sup>95</sup> Several other elites, Suu Kyi, who had been in Burma to visit her ailing mother;

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93 Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 95–97; Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 114.

94 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 197–98; David I. Steinberg, *Future of Burma: Crisis and Choice in Myanmar* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1990), 31.

95 *Ibid.*, 193–98.



U Nu, the first prime minister of Burma that was ousted by a military coup; and Tin Oo, a former supporter of Ne Win until arrested for treason, joined the pro-democracy movement.<sup>96</sup> The demonstrators believed that since Tin Oo was a former defense minister he would be able to convince officers to defect and persuade the military to switch its allegiance.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the protestors viewed Suu Kyi as their beacon of hope against the repressive regime after they heard her first inspiring speech at Shwedagon Pagoda, which captured their hearts.<sup>98</sup> The Burmese people's deeply held respect for Suu Kyi originated from the memory of her father, Aung San.<sup>99</sup> Suu Kyi became committed to freeing the Burmese people from oppression and disregarded the government's travel ban and embarked on a cross-country tour calling for democracy and promoting nonviolence.

Several organizations emerged as the anti-government protests persisted. In RU, the students built up an "intricate network of contacts throughout [its] four campuses."<sup>100</sup> Advised by former protest-experienced students, they formed an information department, a social welfare department, an intelligence unit, and even a prison.<sup>101</sup> The All Burma Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU) and the ABFSU Reorganizing Committee re-surfaced after years of being underground, and the All-Burma Student's Democratic Front (ABSDF) "emerged as a major student organization" consisting of eighteen groups after the August 8 mass uprising.<sup>102</sup> To sustain the pressure on the regime, the students organized another general strike for August 22 that once again had nationwide support.

By September, it seemed the regime had lost control. Hundreds of independent organizations made-up of different segments of the population formed throughout the country as the resignation of two leaders, Ne Win and later Sein Lwin, the lifting of

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96 Steinberg, *Future of Burma*, 30.

97 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 116.

98 Mark R. Thompson, "Female Leadership of Democratic Transitions in Asia," *Pacific Affairs* 75, no. 4 (Winter, 2002), 545.

99 Ibid., 542.

100 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 9.

101 Ibid.

102 Min, "Burma: A Historical Force," 102; Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 104.

martial law, and the retreat of the military and riot police from the cities emboldened citizens to continue to press for change.<sup>103</sup> Civil society seemed to be gaining control as the military withdrew and the regime appeared helpless.

The sense of impending victory filled the atmosphere, but the division among the movement's political elites and increasing violence within the movement replaced solidarity with a feeling of uncertainty and paranoia.<sup>104</sup> U Nu, apparently seeing a chance to return to power, pressed movement leaders and the public to support his interim government with himself as the leader.<sup>105</sup> He gained little support. Instead, Suu Kyi, Aung Gyi, and Tin Oo formed a political party, the National League for Democracy (NLD), and preferred to work within the current political system to change the regime. Moreover, rumors of government sabotage such as "poisoning the water supplies of the demonstrators and deliberately instigating unrest by sponsoring gangs of robbers" led to increasing violence.<sup>106</sup> Protestors beheaded suspected saboteurs, destroyed government buildings, and other violent acts.<sup>107</sup> Instead of maintaining the focus on ousting the regime, local strike committees and protesting monks became distracted with taking over local government functions, such as trash collection and traffic control.<sup>108</sup> Burma appeared to be falling into chaos as law and order disintegrated, and the movement leaders were unable to maintain control of the various opposition groups or stymie the violence perpetrated by the demonstrators. On September 18, the military reemerged as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) and forcibly restored law and order.

The SLORC succeeded in ending the nationwide protests in October 1988. Majority of the SMOs, especially the ones that had developed for the movement, fearing

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103 Min, "Burma: A Historical Force," 196; Christina Fink, "The Moment of the Monks: Burma, 2007," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, ed. Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 58.

104 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 121.

105 Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 103.

106 Byungkuk Soh, "The Crisis of 1988 in Myanmar: A Watershed in the History of Myanmar-American Relations," *International Area Studies Review* 11, no. 2 (September 2008): 375.

107 Ibid.

108 "Resistance of the Monks," 44–45.

reprisal ceased their anti-government activity, while the regime arrested students and monks who continued to organize illegally. The politically active All-Burma Young Monk's Association, that survived Ne Win's rule, disbanded itself after the SLORC incarcerated its leaders, and some of the "ex-civil servants, politicians, writers, and intellectuals that took part in the demonstrations quickly dispersed, some fleeing overseas."<sup>109</sup> To deter further student protests, the military junta shut down the universities for three years, and many students fled to join the armed ethnic groups along the border.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, the soldiers, who had names and photographs of several protest participants, raided local strike centers, monasteries, businesses, and private residences and arrested student activists, movement leaders, and military defectors. The SLORC coerced people to return to their homes and jobs and promised to convene a multi-party election in two years in an "effort to diffuse internal and external pressure, certify its rule, and receive foreign aid."<sup>111</sup> Suu Kyi and the NLD attempted to embark on election campaigns but the junta placed her under house arrest and imprisoned the other members.<sup>112</sup> It seemed that little had changed in Burma even though the nonviolent movement had almost toppled the regime.

### **C. THE FAILURE OF BURMA'S 1988 NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT**

Prior to the 1988 nonviolent movement, the regime was unified and the opposition unconnected. Ne Win had successfully insulated the regime from internal and external threats through purges, surveillance, repression, and economic isolation. The various opposition groups held periodic protests against the regime but they were small, short, and ineffective in influencing reform. Over the years, the university students gained experience in publicly challenging the regime, but the government's constant surveillance and arrest of student leaders hindered their ability to build camaraderie with each other and solidarity with other oppositional groups or former political elites. The monks periodically joined student-led protests, but because of their antagonistic

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<sup>109</sup> Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *History of Myanmar*, 262.

<sup>110</sup> Hlaing, "Burma: Civil Society," 405–12.

<sup>111</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 97.

<sup>112</sup> Stephan and Chenoweth, "Why Civil Resistance Works," 37–40.

relationship with the regime and the military, they had no influence in persuading the ruling party to reform or deterring the troops from attacking. U Nu, Tin Oo, Aung Gyi, and Suu Kyi had no meaningful connection with the students, other oppositional groups, or each other. After his government-in-exile faltered from a lack of funding and support, U Nu did not create another parallel government until the 1988 nonviolent movement. Tin Oo waited until the movement to openly oppose the regime, Aung Gyi began to criticize Ne Win a few months prior to the uprising, and Suu Kyi joined the demonstrations after it began. Prior to the start of the nonviolent movement, the odds of the opposition overthrowing the dictatorship were low.

Crippling financial hardship, injustice, and repressed grievances led to the populace rising up against a powerful foe in 1988. Students, housewives, monks, young schoolchildren, and numerous others marched peacefully, went on hunger strikes, quit working, held demonstrations, and used other types of nonviolent methods to pressure the regime to change. Some protesters used violence, but the term nonviolent movement\* does not necessarily “mean the absence of violence,” but it does refer to the main strategy used by the opposition to overthrow the government.<sup>113</sup> As the nonviolent movement gained momentum and strength, local governments collapsed and transportation came to a standstill. It seemed the unarmed demonstrators would succeed in overthrowing the regime, but the movement leaders’ lost their focus. Instead of working together and uniting the movement, they worked separately and pursued their own agendas and caused the movement to fail.

The fragmented leadership and the movement’s internal disorganization caused the uprising to fall into chaos and succumb to the Tatmadaw’s attack as it reinstated law and order. The lack of solidarity among and within the opposition groups undermined their ability to take advantage of the three-week absence of the regime and security forces. Instead of uniting, the two underground student unions that emerged during the movement, ABFSU and the ABFSU Reorganizing Committee, rivaled each other.<sup>114</sup> The

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<sup>113</sup> Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 8. \*A violent movement or armed insurgency uses weapons and guerrilla or military tactics as the main strategy to win territory or take over the state.

<sup>114</sup> Min, “Burma: A Historical Force,” 196.

oppositional elites refused to support U Nu's parallel government because they believed his concern lay with returning to power rather than achieving democracy, and they mistakenly assumed that the SLORC would honor election results. There was no alternative government to take over and bring the people together for another large-scale demonstration to solidify a new government authority. During BSPP's absence, people were unsure if the regime members had fled and uncertain who was in charge. As ambiguity and confusion set in, law and order deteriorated and movement leaders lost control of the movement and any chance of gaining leverage over the regime. The military rulers had time to regroup and redeploy troops to end the pro-democracy movement.

The BSPP's repressive strategy and isolationist policy thwarted the movement's ability to gain leverage. Ne Win's purges strengthened the regime's solidarity and solidified the military's loyalty. During the heightened period of unrest, two regime leaders resigned but the ruling party remained intact. When the BSPP failed to end the nationwide protest, instead of collapsing, it simply turned over control to the Tatmadaw, which succeeded in violently suppressing the movement. In a predominantly Buddhist country, the Burmese sangha had little sway over the regime or the military because of its antagonistic interaction with the ruling party and the security forces since independence. The placement of the sangha under state control helped deepen the division of the monks into two factions—ones who supported the regime and others who opposed it. Suu Kyi had more of an influence than the monks in galvanizing support, and she “emerged as the leading voice for the opposition,” but her focus was on letting the people select Burma's leader through elections instead of overthrowing the government.<sup>115</sup> Several military and police personnel joined the movement, but because of their low rank, their defection had little effect on the unity of the armed forces.

Furthermore, international pressures had no influence on the outcome of the nonviolent movement since it came after the SLORC regained control. The previously uninterested international community became concerned after learning about the violent

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115 Lintner, *Outrage: Burma's Struggle*, 116.

suppression of unarmed citizens fighting for democracy, the arrest of Suu Kyi, and the failure of the movement. The democratic nations condemned the regime's actions, and "most donors suspended their assistance programs."<sup>116</sup> Nevertheless, while the West imposed sanctions, other states continued to support the junta. Thailand negotiated logging rights to Burma's teak forests and Pakistan, Singapore, and China sold weapons to the Burmese military. Private foreign investments in fishing, oil exploration, tourism, and other industries provided SLORC with much-needed revenue.<sup>117</sup> The military regime, which had survived self-imposed isolation since 1962, was immune to the international condemnation. The regime's unwavering cohesion inhibited the opposition from gaining leverage while the movement's fragmented leadership undermined the movement's resiliency. Burma's first nationwide nonviolent movement failed to cause regime change.

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116 Soh, "Crisis of 1988 in Myanmar," 376.

117 Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 112–13.

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### III. MYANMAR'S 2007 NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT

Almost twenty-years passed before another nonviolent movement occurred in Burma, which the regime had renamed Myanmar in 1989. The 2007 monk-led Saffron Revolution emerged from smaller protests that had been led by students who criticized the military junta for removing fuel subsidies and, consequently, drastically decreasing the people's purchasing power. Despite attracting significant support and international attention, the peaceful monk-led procession struggled to survive attacks by the security forces and the regime's militia. The Saffron Revolution's lack of leadership and the nonstop repression by the senior generals undermined the movement's resilience, and the junta's impenetrable solidarity prevented the opposition from gaining leverage and led to the movement's failure. This chapter will describe the changes that occurred in the regime and opposition groups after the 1988 uprising, and their contentious interactions prior to the 2007 movement. Then it will detail the Saffron Revolution and analyze its resilience and leverage.

#### A. PRE-2007 BACKGROUND OF THE REGIME AND ITS OPPOSITION

After the military suppressed the 1988 pro-democracy movement, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) focused on preventing the occurrence of another large-scale anti-government protest and protecting the regime against internal and external threats. The ruling generals re-imposed laws and constraints targeted at curbing people's pursuit of political or social change. They outlawed the assembly of five or more individuals and banned student-formed political parties and other politically oriented organizations.<sup>118</sup> To prevent civil servants "from participating in future anti-regime demonstrations," the junta replaced senior level civilian administrators with retired military officers.<sup>119</sup> It also increased troop numbers "from 180,000 [personnel] in the late 1980s to 300,000 by 1995, with the official aim being to reach 500,000 troops" for the

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<sup>118</sup> Min, "Burma: A Historic Force," 188, 199.

<sup>119</sup> Win Min, "Under an Iron Heel: Civil-Military Relations in Burma/Myanmar," in *Democracy Under Stress: Civil-Military Relations in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Paul Chambers and Aurel Croissant, (Bangkok: Institute of Security & International Studies, 2010), 110.



purpose of ending “any mass movement or armed ethnic resistance that might emerge in the future and ensur[ing] tighter control over government.”<sup>120</sup> As an added precaution, the ruling generals constructed the new state capital in a secluded area 240 miles north of Rangoon and relocated “tens of thousands of public servants” from the old capital to the new one to physically isolate the regime from the populace.<sup>121</sup>

After Chairman General Saw Maung suffered a mental breakdown in 1992, General Than Shwe stepped in as the SLORC leader and continued Ne Win’s strategy of purging disloyal regime members and military officers.<sup>122</sup> After changing the junta’s name to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, he replaced “fourteen older SLORC members” and three other officials with younger military officers to “get rid of potential rivals and some of the more notoriously corrupt colleagues.”<sup>123</sup> In 2004, when Than Shwe perceived that Prime Minister Khin Nyunt, the former intelligence chief, had gained too much power and was acting too independently, he charged him with corruption and placed him under house arrest with a sentence of forty-four years.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, he imprisoned Khin Nyunt’s supporters and shut down the intelligence corps, the Military Intelligence Service (MIS), which was loyal to Nyunt.<sup>125</sup> Than Shwe increased the frequency of reshuffling officers in senior level positions in the regime and the armed forces to “prevent the formation of internal factions and power bases.”<sup>126</sup> His strategy seemed to work since another major purge did not occur while he remained in power.

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<sup>120</sup> Andrew Selth, “Burma’s ‘Saffron Revolution’ and the Limits of International Influence,” *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 62, no. 3 (2008), 292; Min, “Under an Iron Heel,” 110.

<sup>121</sup> “Crackdown: Repression of the 2007 Popular Protests in Burma.” *Human Rights Watch Report* 19, no. 18 (December 6, 2007), 20; McCarthy, “Overturning the Alms,” 307.

<sup>122</sup> Robert Thomas Jr., “Saw Maung Is Dead at 68: Led a Brutal Burmese Coup,” *New York Times*, 27 July 1997.

<sup>123</sup> “Myanmar...Formerly Known as SLORC,” *Economist*, 20 November 1997.

<sup>124</sup> Min, “Under an Iron Heel,” 112.

<sup>125</sup> “Crackdown: Repression,” 20.

<sup>126</sup> Susanne Prager Nyein, “Expanding Military, Shrinking Citizenry and the New Constitution in Burma,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 39, no. 4 (2009), 641.

The junta also used economic incentives and lucrative postings to buy allegiance and deter defection. It raised troop wages by forty-five percent and increased the defense budget “from less than 100 million in 1988 to close to \$1 billion in 1994...which is twice its combined spending on education and health.”<sup>127</sup> As a reward for loyalty, the regime placed regional commanders into “cabinet positions in the ministries.”<sup>128</sup> Government officials and military officers received revenue from the operation of state-owned enterprises (SOE) and the sale of natural resources, which was \$1.2 billion from 2006 to 2007.<sup>129</sup> The regime allocated “less than one percent” of the profit from the sale to public goods and services.<sup>130</sup> Upon retirement, senior officials collected pensions from every government position that they had previously held and “received about thirty percent interest on their investments” in SOEs annually.<sup>131</sup> After their death, their families continued to receive government support. For example, when former Secretary General Tin Oo died, the regime gave his wife and children a mansion and business concessions.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, the consequences of disloyalty were imprisonment, exile, and the loss of access to state-controlled revenue. The regime also confiscated many of the person’s privately-owned businesses and nationalized them.<sup>133</sup> In a poverty-stricken country, the regime officials and military officers had more of an incentive to remain loyal to Than Shwe than to side with the opposition. It was in their best interest to suppress dissent.

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127 Andrew Selth, “The Armed Forces and Military Rule in Burma,” in *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 103; Jalal Alamgir, “Against the Current: The Survival of Authoritarianism in Burma,” *Pacific Affairs* 70, no. 3 (Autumn 1997), 344.

128 Nyein, “Expanding Military,” 641.

129 Sean Turnell, “The Rape of Burma: Where Did the Wealth Go?” *Japan Times*, 2 May 2008.

130 *Ibid.*

131 Kyaw Yin Hlaing, “Setting the Rules: Why the Burmese Military Regime Survives in an Age of Democratization,” *Pacific Review* 22, no. 3 (July, 2009), 283–84.

132 *Ibid.*, 284.

133 *Ibid.*, 285.

## 1. The Military Junta and the International Community

With help from non-Western states, the ruling generals survived a failing economy and continued their repressive rule. Many Western states imposed sanctions on Myanmar for the indiscriminate violence used against the 1988 protesters, but they had little success in convincing the Burmese government to change its autocratic ways. “Most donors, including the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, suspended aid,” but China increased its support.<sup>134</sup> American companies, such as PepsiCo and Eddie Bauer, shut down their operations, but Japanese firms, such as Nissan Motor Co., Ltd. and Daewoo, began business ventures with Myanmar.<sup>135</sup> Between 1993 and 1997, “Japan provided \$432.2 million in grants, \$44.5 million in technical cooperation, and \$75.36 million in loans.”<sup>136</sup> The regime welcomed the financial support but refused to be coerced into curbing its undemocratic behavior. Despite receiving a significant amount of assistance from Japan, the regime disregarded Tokyo’s warning that it would end development aid if the junta continued suppressing the opposition. In 1996, after attacking Suu Kyi’s motorcade during her cross-country democracy campaign, they returned her to house arrest without regard to a possible international backlash.<sup>137</sup> The regime also ignored the annual United Nations (UN) resolutions calling for the “release of political prisoners and political dialogue with all stakeholders.”<sup>138</sup> Sanctions and diplomatic pressures failed to weaken the authoritarian regime. Instead, with continued support from other countries, the “military government became stronger [and] its grip on political power tightened.”<sup>139</sup>

The junta received most of its support from nations that wanted access to Myanmar’s valuable natural resources and its markets. In order to improve Myanmar’s dismal economy and the profitability of its SOEs, the regime ended its policy of

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134 Alamgir, “Against the Current,” 347, 349; Steinberg, *Burma: State of Myanmar*, 253.

135 *Ibid.*, 347.

136 Steinberg, *Burma: State of Myanmar*, 256-57.

137 Marvin C. Ott, “From Isolation to Relevance: Policy Considerations,” in *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 79.

138 Fink, “Moment of the Monks,” 363.

139 Selth, “Burma’s ‘Saffron Revolution,’” 288.

isolationism and opened the country to foreign aid, trade, and investment. While Western governments imposed sanctions, China and other Asian countries took advantage of this change in policy. For example, China assisted Myanmar in building up its military and supplied about \$300 million in arms from 1992 to 1994 and signed a contract to provide an additional \$1.2 billion of military equipment. Bilateral trade with China increased from \$313.72 million in 1989 to \$1.2 billion in 2005, and its ventures in energy and mining were worth about \$194 million by 2005. China was Myanmar's main diplomatic supporter but only its thirteenth largest investor. Singapore was the top provider at \$1.1 billion. Malaysia invested close to \$446 million in 1996, which was three times larger than the previous year. Russia's investments in Myanmar's oil and gas industry equaled about \$33 million in 2006, and Moscow received an oil exploration contract from the ruling generals for its veto of a 2007 UN resolution against the Burmese regime. During the Saffron Revolution, India pursued business deals and signed hydrocarbon exploration contracts with the SPDC while security forces violently suppressed protestors. With such strong support, the junta worried more about internal dissent than external censure, and supporting states cared more about access to Myanmar's natural resources than the fate of Burmese citizens.<sup>140</sup>

In order to limit the population's exposure to foreign influence but to help meet people's needs without spending state funds, the junta allowed certain international civil society organizations (CSOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) to operate in Myanmar but confined their activities to nonthreatening projects. To meet the regime's standards, the organizations had to be apolitical, hire from a government-approved list of employees, and take along a regime representative whenever they traveled in the country.<sup>141</sup> In certain instances, the regime required international non-government organizations (NGOs) to channel their funds or supplies through the local military.<sup>142</sup> By

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140 Alamgir, "Against the Current," 348; Maung Aung Myoe, "Sino-Myanmar Economic Relations Since 1988," *Asia Research Institute* working paper 86, National University of Singapore (April 2007): 5, 14; Fink, "Moment of the Monks," 363; Ardeth Maung Thawngmung and Maung Aung Myoe, "Myanmar in 2007: A Turning Point in the 'Roadmap'?" *Asian Survey* 48, no. 1 (January/February, 2008), 16, 18.

141 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 181.

142 Steinberg, *Burma: State of Myanmar*, 117.

2007, about fifty foreign NGOs and eleven UN-sponsored groups were in Myanmar to “meet community deprivation needs not addressed by the government.”<sup>143</sup> The regime shut down or imposed additional restrictions on any group that appeared to be involved in anti-government activities. For example, when the International Red Cross (IRC) director openly criticized the government for human rights abuses, the SPDC made it nearly impossible for the IRC to function properly.<sup>144</sup> Frustrated, the IRC closed down its offices. To ensure their programs endured, the remaining international NGOs and UN agencies in Myanmar focused on “health, education, HIV/AIDS, and agricultural” projects and kept away from politically contentious areas.<sup>145</sup> The National League for Democracy (NLD) viewed the apolitical foreign organizations as being harmful rather than helpful because their activities helped legitimize the regime.<sup>146</sup> By being apolitical and abiding by the rules of the state, the foreign civil society groups were more advantageous to the junta than the opposition.

## **2. The Military Junta and Activists**

The ruling generals made it challenging for Burmese activists to assemble or organize in Myanmar. The SLORC shut down and outlawed CSOs and social movement organizations (SMOs) that emerged during the 1988 uprising; however, it allowed non-political advocacy groups to operate but only under regime supervision. Since government accountants periodically checked the groups’ financial records, this intrusive act deterred local NGOs from seeking or accepting foreign donations, which was illegal, but did not dissuade people from forming new associations.<sup>147</sup> By 2004, there were approximately 241,000 community, professional, “religious, parent-teacher, and social groups” in Myanmar.<sup>148</sup> The SPDC shut down twenty-four that it suspected of

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<sup>143</sup> Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 122-23.

<sup>144</sup> Thawngmung and Myoe, “Myanmar in 2007,” 14.

<sup>145</sup> Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 123.

<sup>146</sup> Steinberg, *Burma: State of Myanmar*, 119.

<sup>147</sup> Hlaing, “Burma: Civil Society,” 407.

<sup>148</sup> Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 122.

advocating regime change, and it forced the resignation of the Funeral Service Society's chairman because of his involvement in anti-regime protests.<sup>149</sup>

To help surveil the overwhelming number of civic groups, the regime formed its own CSO, the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA), which was a de facto civilian arm of the military and thus received state patronage. The hierarchical and pervasive USDA had “sixteen offices at the state and division level, fifty-seven at the district, 318 at the township, and 14,536 at the ward or village levels.”<sup>150</sup> By providing preferential access to education, business opportunities, and government jobs, the USDA attracted numerous members from various parts of society.<sup>151</sup> The association's membership grew from over five million in 1995 to twenty-four million by 2007.<sup>152</sup> In addition to monitoring civilian-formed CSOs, it harassed activists and organized pro-government and anti-opposition rallies.<sup>153</sup> The regime also formed a civilian militia, the Swan Arr Shin (Masters of Force), to assist the USDA in “prevent[ing] or suppress[ing] pro-democracy demonstrations.”<sup>154</sup> Most of the CSOs wanted to avoid harassment or imprisonment, so they limited themselves to activities the regime perceived as nonthreatening and avoided political dissent.

Furthermore, the junta made the lives of alleged activists difficult. It relocated citizens suspected of anti-regime activities outside of Rangoon, and with long commute times and the loss of support they had in their previous community, many of the displaced individuals' “quality of life and incomes” decreased drastically.<sup>155</sup> Other presumed democracy sympathizers experienced home raids by security forces, loss of their medical or law licenses, forcible closure of their businesses, or difficulty in getting

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<sup>149</sup> Thawngmung and Myoe, “Myanmar in 2007,” 14.

<sup>150</sup> Steinberg, *Burma: The State of Myanmar*, 111.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-14.

<sup>152</sup> “Burma Junta Support Group USDA Disbands,” *BBC News* (15 July 2010).

<sup>153</sup> Hlaing, “Burma: Civil Society,” 406; Steinberg, *Burma: State of Myanmar*, 111; Nyein, “Expanding Military,” 644.

<sup>154</sup> Min, “Under an Iron Heel,” 111; Nyein, “Expanding Military,” 644.

<sup>155</sup> Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 164.

their children into school or the monkhood.<sup>156</sup> The USDA and Swan Arr Shin harassed people who visited prominent activists in their homes “regardless of the purpose of their visit,” and some people who were taken into police custody disappeared.<sup>157</sup> The regime, businesses, military, and their community treated released political prisoners and their families like pariahs. The former internees had a difficult time finding employment or running their own businesses because the regime placed employers who hired them “under more direct surveillance,” and the security forces hassled customers who shopped at businesses “of known activists.”<sup>158</sup> Friends of a well-known activist, Aung Din, chose to avoid attending the funeral of Din’s father to avoid harassment and scrutiny by the USDA.<sup>159</sup> The regime’s proactive efforts helped compel the public’s compliance and discourage defiance.

As an additional measure to weaken the opposition, the junta limited the ability of activists to communicate with the public, international community, and opposition groups within and outside Myanmar. It maintained a tight control over digital communication and print media to minimize the activists’ capability to garner support, organize protests, and spread or publish anti-regime rhetoric. Additionally, it monitored Internet activity, blocked unauthorized websites, and restricted access to the Internet by charging an exorbitant \$700 connection fee.<sup>160</sup> With an average yearly income of only \$435, the majority of Burmese citizens could not afford Internet access, a \$1000 cell phone, or even a \$75 SIM card.<sup>161</sup> Nevertheless, despite the government’s control of print media, television broadcasts, the Internet, and cellular phones, it was unable to prevent foreign radio stations located outside of Myanmar from transmitting into the country. Underground activists risked arrest by smuggling evidence of regime oppression to

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<sup>156</sup> Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 164–67.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>160</sup> Linnea M. Beatty, “Democracy Activism and Assistance in Burma: Sites of Resistance,” *International Journal* 65, no. 3, Democracy assistance (Summer 2010): 633; Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 189.

<sup>161</sup> Alamgir, “Against the Current,” 345; Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 188; Beatty, “Democracy Activism and Assistance,” 634.

foreign broadcasters such as Voice of America and Radio Free Asia, so the newscasters could transmit the information back into Myanmar.<sup>162</sup>

With the restrictive political environment, most of the political CSOs developed outside of Myanmar to oppose the regime. According to Hlaing, forty groups “emerged in North America, Europe, and Asia.”<sup>163</sup> The Free Burma Coalition (FBC), formed in the United States by a Burmese graduate student in 1995, successfully gained support from American students, universities, and cities and international human rights organizations. It played a significant role in pressuring the “United States and EU countries to impose economic sanctions” on Myanmar, persuading U.S. companies, such as PepsiCo and Eddie Bauer, to shut down their Burmese operations, and influencing “twenty-five American cities” to pass laws prohibiting dealings with U.S. businesses that had investments in the military-controlled state.<sup>164</sup> While some of the pro-democracy groups, like the FBC, were successful in gaining foreign support, their influence inside Myanmar was minimal or nonexistent. By driving activists out of Myanmar, the regime was able to sever their connections to dissidents inside the country and sharply limit their influence.

### **3. The Military Junta and Students**

After the mass demonstrations in 1988, the regime’s encroachment into the lives of university students became much more pervasive and disruptive as it attempted to deter student activism. In fact, the junta closed campuses entirely from 1988 to 1992 and increased surveillance against university students, especially those who had led or participated in the 1988 nonviolent movement. Military intelligence officers routinely checked on students and threatened teachers and hired student informers to report suspicious student activity.<sup>165</sup> Students found it challenging to “organize underground

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<sup>162</sup> Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 121, 169.

<sup>163</sup> Hlaing, “Burma: Civil Society,” 408.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 413.

<sup>165</sup> Min, “Burma: A Historic Force,” 200.



activities,” and some of them “gave up activism, while others continued with more caution” or operated in areas beyond the controls of the state.<sup>166</sup>

Some of the students who had fled to the border areas to escape imprisonment after the 1988 movement formed the All Burma Student’s Democratic Front (ABSDF) to help expose the military regime’s human rights abuses. They worked with international NGOs, such as Amnesty International and Asia Watch, in Thailand and in areas along the border that the ethnic minority groups controlled. Nevertheless, with the persistent infighting over leadership, violating human rights itself, and losing international donors, the ABSDF disbanded. The leaders from the ABSDF eventually learned to work together, formed a loose alliance, found new donors, and waited for the opportune time to act against the regime. Nonetheless, with increased government surveillance, a diminished number of political advocacy groups inside Myanmar, and tightly controlled communication, it was difficult for the group to mobilize or support an anti-regime movement since its links within the state were weak.<sup>167</sup>

Despite the regime’s efforts to suppress dissent, it was unable to completely forestall student activism. To organize protests, students depended on word of mouth, flyers, and the underground network. In 1990, students held anti-regime protests to oppose the regime’s repudiation of that year’s general election results and to commemorate the 1988 movement. A year later, they led another protest calling for the release of Suu Kyi after she won the Nobel Peace Prize. Every time the students demonstrated, the regime reacted with its usual response of arrests and school closures. Frustrated with its inability to deter dissent, the junta decreased the academic year to six months to limit the time students spent with each other. Instead of curbing student activism, the shortening of the school year led to a large-scale student protest in 1996 demanding a better educational system. The SLORC arrested over 100 students, and then closed schools for four years. The last anti-regime protest prior to 2007 occurred in 1998 when universities opened for exams, and students gathered to show their support for the NLD that was attempting to convene a session of parliament with representatives elected

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<sup>166</sup> Min, “Burma: A Historic Force,” 200.

<sup>167</sup> Hlaing, “Burma: Civil Society,” 405–12.

during the nullified 1990 elections. The security forces ended the demonstration by arresting the student protest leaders and sentencing them with excessive prison terms. The longest being over fifty years. In 2005, several of the student leaders of the 1988 movement organized informally. To avoid arrests, the newly formed 88 Generation Students' Group conducted low-key activities to oppose the regime such as petitions and letter writing campaigns.<sup>168</sup>

The dictatorship implemented additional preemptive measures to end student activism. The junta broke-up universities and moved different departments to other locations to minimize the number of students congregating in one place.<sup>169</sup> It split up engineering students by building a new technical institute for engineers in Mandalay, the Mandalay Institute of Technology (MIT), for the students of upper Burma, while the students in Rangoon attended Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT). From 2000 onward, the engineering students had to attend three different schools to earn their degree. They spent the first two years at government technical universities, the second two years at technical colleges, and the last two years at MIT or RIT.<sup>170</sup> Several universities were built in suburban areas, so the commute time for students increased, which decreased their free time available for networking or organizing.<sup>171</sup> With the volatile nature of campus closures, over seventy percent of students took their courses online with the University of Distance Education.<sup>172</sup> The breakup and relocation of universities and preference for online learning made it difficult for students to “recruit, build up organizations or organize demonstrations,” but they still remained undeterred in challenging state authority when an opportunity presented itself.<sup>173</sup>

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168 Min, “Burma: A Historic Force,” 188-89, 200.

169 Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 183.

170 Min, “Burma: A Historic Force,” 201.

171 Ibid.

172 Ibid., 200.

173 Beatty, “Challenge and Survival,” 183.

#### 4. The Military Junta and the Monks

The SLORC attempted to increase its control over the sangha since preventive measures under the Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) had failed to discourage the monks' from participating in anti-government protests. The junta outlawed all sangha associations except for the state-controlled Union of Myanmar Sangha Organization.<sup>174</sup> It imposed laws prohibiting the involvement of monks in politics, authorized punishment for disobedient monks, and prevented the sangha from performing religious ceremonies or building religious structures without government permission.<sup>175</sup> Similar to Ne Win, Saw Maung and Than Shwe rewarded loyal monks with lavish gifts and titles and punished dissident ones with imprisonment or disrobement. After the 1988 crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators and follow-on persecution, about "300 monks fled to the border with Thailand, joining an estimated 10,000 student refugees," and numerous others went underground.<sup>176</sup> Military intelligence increased its surveillance on the sangha and security forces raided monasteries suspected of harboring activists. Saw Maung justified the junta's actions by claiming that "Buddhist scriptures and king's law" gave them the right as "Buddhist rulers to invade and purify the domain of the Buddhist monks."<sup>177</sup>

Numerous monks continued to defy the regime and support student activists despite repeated warnings and attacks by the government. In 1990, approximately 20,000 Buddhist monks and nuns imposed a religious boycott by refusing to accept alms from the regime and military after the security forces killed some of the monks protesting with students on the anniversary of the 1988 pro-democracy movement.<sup>178</sup> The security forces responded to the boycott by beating, disrobing, imprisoning, and killing several monks and raiding "at least 130 monasteries in Mandalay alone."<sup>179</sup> The regime imprisoned

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174 McCarthy, "Overturning the Alms Bowl," 302.

175 Ibid., 302–03.

176 Matthews, "Buddhism Under a Military Regime," 421.

177 McCarthy, "Overturning the Alms Bowl," 302.

178 Matthews, "Buddhism Under a Military Regime," 420–21; "Crackdown: Repression," 18–19; Min, "Burma: A Historic Force," 188.

179 "Crackdown: Repression," 19.

about 3,000 monks and sentenced Thu Mingala, a revered senior monk, to a prison term of eight years for his participation in the religious condemnation.<sup>180</sup> The monks remained undeterred. Motivated by their “concern for the suffering of the people,” when the regime incarcerated most of the student leaders during the price hike protests in 2007, the monks took over and organized the second largest nonviolent movement against the regime since 1988.<sup>181</sup>

## **5. The Military Junta and Internal Opposition**

The military regime allowed the NLD to operate and maintain its status as a political party after the 1988 uprising, but the organization was unable to gain any power to influence reforms. Still believing changes could be made from within the government, the NLD participated in the 1990 general election along with several other parties. The junta, which was surprised that Suu Kyi’s party won around eighty percent of the parliamentary seats, nullified the votes and claimed the intent of the election was to select members for the National Convention to “draft a new constitution.”<sup>182</sup> The regime’s actions angered the NLD, but the opposition party was powerless to force the SLORC to honor the election or implement government reforms.

The junta kept the NLD weak by repeatedly harassing and arresting its members. Threatened by Suu Kyi’s popularity, the SLORC sentenced her to home confinement and imprisoned many of her NLD associates in 1989. In 1991, the SLORC incarcerated forty-eight NLD officials for alleged treason, and five years later, it arrested 260 for participating in a student-led protest against police brutality.<sup>183</sup> While Suu Kyi remained confined in her home, the NLD members “focused on maintaining the legal status of the party and were reluctant to engage in activism on the streets” because they feared arrest.<sup>184</sup> Whenever they held meetings or gatherings, they stayed within the confines of their headquarters in Rangoon, which was heavily monitored by intelligence officers and

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180 “Crackdown: Repression,” 32, 19; McCarthy, “Overturning the Alms,” 302.

181 Fink, “Moment of the Monks,” 360.

182 “Crackdown: Repression,” 18.

183 Alamgir, “Against the Current,” 346.

184 Fink, “Moment of the Monks,” 360.

the only NLD office authorized by the government.<sup>185</sup> The NLD had difficulty in raising funds for itself because accepting foreign donations was illegal, and the regime harassed domestic donors.<sup>186</sup> In 1995, the ruling generals released Suu Kyi, but two years later, they returned her to house arrest because of her undiminished popularity and persistent campaigning for democracy.<sup>187</sup> From 1989 to 2007, Suu Kyi had been in confinement for about thirteen years. The NLD had to operate without its most respected and popular founder and de facto leader, and it failed to make any progress in undermining the dictatorship.

Each time the regime released Suu Kyi from house arrest, she enacted her own form of civil disobedience instead of organizing protests. She disobeyed the regime's travel restrictions and made repeated attempts to travel outside of Rangoon to campaign for democracy. When the security forces stopped her, she sat in her vehicle for several days and nights to protest the regime's restriction on her movements. Between 1998 and 2000, she conducted three sit-ins ranging from five to 13 days.<sup>188</sup> After she tried leaving Rangoon again in September 2000, the regime, fed-up with her noncompliance, returned her to house arrest. After being released in 2002, Suu Kyi and the NLD "embarked on a series of rallies around the country that drew crowds of tens of thousands of supporters."<sup>189</sup> In response, the USDA and Swan Arr Shin militia attempted to disrupt these pro-democracy assemblies. In 2003, they attacked Suu Kyi's convoy, injuring her and killing about 100 of her supporters.<sup>190</sup> Afterwards, the regime returned her to house arrest where she remained until 2010.<sup>191</sup> In spite of being confined during the Saffron Revolution, she was able to galvanize support for the protesting monks. The regime's fear of Suu Kyi's popularity seemed to be well founded.

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185 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 182.

186 Ibid., 174, 168.

187 "Crackdown: Repression," 19.

188 "Daw Suu Watch: Formative Years and Political Beginnings," *Alternative Asean Network on Burma*, accessed 26 September 2015.

189 "Crackdown: Repression," 19–20.

190 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 120.

191 Ibid.

NLD's lack of unity contributed to its powerlessness. Many of the party members were "former military officers, ex-bureaucrats, lawyers, journalists, activists, and students" with their own agendas.<sup>192</sup> Aung Gyi, who had formed the NLD with Tin U and Suu Kyi, left the NLD "when former communists joined the party" against his objections.<sup>193</sup> After the SLORC voided the 1990 election results, seven elected parliamentary members from the NLD left and formed the National Coalition Government of the Union of Burma (NCGUB), a parallel government, in the border area controlled by ethnic minority groups.<sup>194</sup> Its focus was mainly on gaining international support than to "act as a parallel government within Burma."<sup>195</sup> The NCGUB moved its headquarters to Washington, DC, to lobby the U.S. government and maintain international attention on Myanmar's human rights abuses. It still maintains offices in India and Thailand and pressures the "UN Security Council to impose sanctions" and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) governments to change their policy towards Myanmar and help bring democratic change.<sup>196</sup> The current and former NLD members want regime change but they prefer to pursue their own strategy instead of compromising and working together to end authoritarian rule.

## **B. 2007 UPRISING: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES**

The historical student-regime rivalry reappeared in August 2007 when the government's removal of fuel subsidies increased diesel oil prices by 100 percent and natural gas by 500 percent, which devastated people's purchasing power for basic needs. About 400 to 500 student activists from the 88 Generation Students' Group started protesting SPDC's sudden removal of fuel subsidies. The debilitating spike in transportation and food costs angered the Burmese citizens as it caught them unprepared

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192 Aung-Thwin and Aung-Thwin, *History of Myanmar*, 263–64.

193 Ibid., 264.

194 Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections*, 104; Josef Silverstein, "The Evolution and Salience of Burma's National Political Culture," in *Burma: Prospects for a Democratic Future*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), 29.

195 Ibid., 104.

196 Simon Shen and Paul Chi-yuen Chan, "Failure of the Saffron Revolution and Aftermath: Revisiting the Transitologist Assumption," *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 9, no. 1 (May 2010), 47; Hlaing, *State of the Pro-Democracy*, 22.

and caused them further impoverishment. The regime still carrying memories of the previous mass uprising quickly arrested most of the activist leaders such as Min Ko Naing who was one of the founders and leaders of the All Burma Federation of Students' Unions (ABFSU). Separate protests led by other groups (NLD, Human Rights Defenders and Promoters, Myanmar Development Committee, and Labor Solidarity Organization) continued to occur, and the USDA and Swan Arr Shin militia responded by assaulting and arresting the protesters. With most of the protest leaders in jail or in hiding, the SPDC thought it had ended public dissent.<sup>197</sup>

In early September, several hundred monks near the city of Mandalay, angered over the people's inability to afford basic goods or to give alms, took over leading the protest against the government.<sup>198</sup> The monks attempted to frame their demonstration as a religious rather than political protest in hopes of deterring attacks by the security forces, but the regime still reacted with violence. The Tatmadaw, USDA, and Swan Arr Shin militia responded by firing warning shots and "beating the monks and bystanders with bamboo sticks."<sup>199</sup>

The SPDC's attack on the peacefully demonstrating monks angered the sangha. The monks demanded the regime apologize for its unprovoked assault on the monks, lower basic commodity prices, release prisoners arrested for opposing the regime, and discuss national reconciliation. Similar to its reaction to the students' demands of 1988, the regime refused to meet the monks' ultimatums. The infuriated monks formed the All Burma Monks Alliance (ABMA) and aligned with the 88 Generation Students' Group to organize a nationwide protest.<sup>200</sup>

The ABMA coordinated a religious boycott against the military through several monasteries throughout the country. During their marches in Rangoon, which began at Shwedagon Pagoda and ended at Sule Pagoda, the monks carried Buddhist flags, placed

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197 McCarthy, "Overturning the Alms," 307; Fink, "Moment of the Monks," 355; "Crackdown: Repression," 23–26.

198 Fink, "Moment of the Monks," 355; "Crackdown: Repression," 23–26; McCarthy, "Overturning the Alms," 307.

199 "Crackdown: Repression," 29.

200 *Ibid.*, 30.

their alms bowls upside down, and chanted the traditional prayer of Metta Sutta, which means loving-kindness.<sup>201</sup> The overturned bowls and refusal to accept alms from the regime and military sent a strong message of disapproval to the ruling generals. Nevertheless, the religious boycott seemed to have little effect on the SPDC and Tatmadaw since they were still able to make merit with “government-allied Buddhist abbots and their monasteries.”<sup>202</sup> Unperturbed, the junta allowed the marches and prayers at pagodas to continue while “plainclothes militia members and military intelligence officials openly photographed and videotaped the protest.”<sup>203</sup>

Initially, the size of the monk-led demonstration was small, but it increased as people’s courage grew, and they decided to participate in the marches. For several days in mid-September, the sangha marched from the Shwedagon to Sule pagodas without interference from the USDA and Swan Arr Shin. Surprisingly, the police helped stop traffic for the procession of 300 to 800 monks while onlookers cheered from the sidewalks.<sup>204</sup> When a group of monks marched to the incarcerated Suu Kyi on September 22 and met her through the locked gates of her home, the moment reinvigorated the sangha and rekindled the public’s feelings of hope. A young monk recalls the emotions he felt when he first saw Suu Kyi, who had been confined for over a decade: ““We got strength from her, and she got strength from us.... my tiredness from walking disappeared. We thought our efforts would be blessed, because we saw this person who sacrificed her life for all of us.””<sup>205</sup> At first the Burmese people were hesitant to participate but after witnessing the monks’ encounter with Suu Kyi, the number of protestors grew to about 20,000.<sup>206</sup> To show their support, 150 NLD members marched with banners in the middle of the demonstrating monks, and ordinary citizens formed human chains around the marchers. The number of protestors ballooned to about 60,000

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201 Fink, “Moment of the Monks,” 356.

202 “Crackdown: Repression,” 31.

203 Ibid., 34.

204 Ibid., 37.

205 Ibid., 41.

206 Ibid., 42.



to 100,000 and spread to roughly twenty-five places throughout the country.<sup>207</sup> Celebrities, Buddhist nuns, and more students joined the protests, and the previously banned All Burma Buddhist Monks Union emerged to show its support.<sup>208</sup> Within a matter of days, the monk-led protests became the second largest nonviolent movement against the military regime.

Unlike its previous reaction to earlier protests, the SPDC seemed to be hesitant in forcibly ending the monk-led demonstrations, but when the number of protesters reached almost 150,000 people, the regime reacted quickly to prevent a repeat of 1988. The minister of religious affairs and the state-controlled Supreme Sangha Council criticized the protesting monks for their involvement in secular affairs and ordered them to desist their unsanctioned activity, and the SPDC warned the public against protesting.<sup>209</sup> The next day the ABMA and the 88 Generation Students Group issued a joint statement encouraging the people to unite against the regime, and the SPDC responded by setting a curfew and reminding the populace that gatherings were against the law.<sup>210</sup> As the regime realized that protests would continue regardless of its warnings, it mobilized troops and riot police to Rangoon and staged barb wired barricades at the Shwedagon and Sule pagodas and along the monks' usual protest route. The police arrested the ABMA leader, U Gambira, and other prominent figures, such as the comedian Zargana, and had vans on standby to take away defiant monks who refused to stop protesting.<sup>211</sup> The regime also shut down the Internet to prevent uploaded images, videos, and information of the protests and repression from being viewed domestically and internationally and "cut off the mobile phones of several journalists working for foreign media" to stop news about the demonstrations from getting out of the country.<sup>212</sup>

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207 "Crackdown: Repression," 41.

208 Fink, "Moment of the Monks," 356; McCarthy, "Overturning the Alms," 310.

209 "Crackdown: Repression," 43–44.

210 *Ibid.*, 44.

211 *Ibid.*, 45.

212 Beatty, "Challenge and Survival," 189–90.

On September 26, the familiar violence-prone riot police and the army confronted the protestors. The security forces surrounded the monks who gathered at Shwedagon and attempted to load them into waiting army trucks. When the monks refused to end their protest, the riot police and army attacked. The onlooking crowd attempted to help the trapped monks, but the security forces responded with tear gas, smoke bombs, warning shots, and physical assault with bamboo sticks and batons. Protestors regrouped in other areas and attempted to continue the demonstrations, but at each place they congregated the riot police and army attacked them. Eventually, the troops began to fire into the crowd, but it still did not deter the protestors. The marchers attempted to appeal to the soldiers by holding up portraits of Aung San in hopes of reminding the troops that they are the people's army and of dissuading them from attacking. Approximately 20,000 protestors joined up again at Shwedagon and marched, without interference, to Botahtaung Pagoda.<sup>213</sup>

The next day, the security forces raided monasteries and beat, disrobed, and incarcerated dissident monks, but protests continued. Soldiers and riot police blockaded the Shwedagon and Sule pagodas, so tens of thousands of people staged a sit-in near Sule and the offices of the UN and chanted for the army to stop killing civilians and monks. The familiar "saffron" colored robes were noticeably missing from the crowd as the regime had imprisoned most of the monks or confined them to their monasteries. The army gave the sitting protestors ten minutes to disperse before shooting warning shots in the air, launching tear gas, and then firing into the crowd. A Japanese reporter, Kenji Nagai, unintentionally filmed his own execution when a soldier walked up to him and shot him to death. The cities were inundated with soldiers, riot police, USDA, and Swan Arr Shin that dealt swiftly and violently with the protestors who were trying to regroup. With the loss of the movement leaders and the continuous encounter with security force violence, the popular uprising came to an end on September 29.<sup>214</sup>

Upon seeing the graphic images of monks being beaten and disrobed, the international community condemned the junta's actions against the unarmed protestors.

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213 "Crackdown: Repression," 47–54.

214 Ibid., 55–68, 76–80; Selth, "Burma's 'Saffron Revolution,'" 286.

Various states encouraged a “peaceful dialogue between the SPDC and the civilian opposition.”<sup>215</sup> ASEAN leaders criticized the SPDC’s use of brutality, and China, which had protected the Burmese government from UN pressure in the past, changed its stance and supported a trimmed down version of the UN Security Council’s presidential statement urging Myanmar to pursue a peaceful resolution and address the needs of its people.<sup>216</sup> The majority of the western countries placed further restrictions on trade and on “financial transactions by [Myanmar’s] armed forces leadership, their families and close associates.”<sup>217</sup> Tokyo once again suspended millions of dollars in aid. Nevertheless, the SPDC ignored the pressure from the international community and took action it felt was necessary to end the nonviolent movement and to preserve its rule.

### **C. THE FAILURE OF MYANMAR’S 2007 NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT**

The junta’s repressive strategy after the 1988 nonviolent movement reinforced its unity and the military’s loyalty and kept the opposition weak and fragmented. The massive scale of the pro-democracy movement in 1988 caught the ruling generals by surprise, exposed their vulnerability, and showed them how powerful the Burmese people could be when they united against the regime. To help inhibit another similar nationwide protest from occurring, the SLORC and later the SPDC went beyond the usual tactics of repression to preempt anti-regime activities. The opposition groups and ordinary civilians desired regime change, but with the junta’s stringent laws, constant surveillance, communication restrictions, disruption of activists’ lives, and imprisonment of protest leaders, they were either unable to or chose not to coalesce. The 88 Generation student leaders periodically led protests, but most of their time was spent in prison. Other than the support of activist monks, the students were mainly on their own in organizing anti-regime rallies, so very few demonstrations occurred between 1988 and 2007. Suu Kyi had the power to galvanize the population against the regime, but she spent thirteen out of eighteen years in confinement since her initial arrest in 1989. When she was freed from

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215 Selth, “Burma’s ‘Saffron Revolution,’” 284.

216 Ibid., 285.

217 Ibid.

house arrest, she chose to use personal civil disobedience and international attention to pressure the regime to change instead of leading a pro-democracy uprising. The CSOs outside of Myanmar also depended on Western states to help bring about change. With profit-seeking nations supporting the military leaders' financially and diplomatically, the opposition groups' use of the international community was an ineffective strategy. The Saffron Revolution had less of a chance to overthrow the regime than the nonviolent movement in 1988, because the junta had become too powerful and the opposition was unconnected and too weak.

The severe economic hardship caused by the SPDC's removal of fuel subsidies and the death of protesting monks led to another large-scale unarmed uprising against the junta in 2007. Monks, nuns, workers, mothers with children, NLD members, and banned opposition groups peacefully marched for several days calling for national reconciliation and the release of Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. As the Saffron Revolution grew in numbers, troops and the riot police teamed up with the USDA and the Swan Arr Shin to end the nonviolent movement. After each attack, the protesters attempted to regroup, but with the movement leaders in prison and most of the monks confined, they succumbed to the regime's strategic and persistent repression and the Saffron Revolution ended with military rule intact.

The regime's violent tactics undermined the resilience of the Saffron Revolution. Various opposition groups that participated in the anti-regime demonstration depended on the monks to lead the challenge against the junta. Most of the banned political groups joined the nonviolent movement after the monk-led procession grew in size and proceeded without being attacked. Once the regime confined the monks, none of the opposition leaders stepped up to lead the protest. Since most of the 88 Generation student leaders were in jail, the movement lacked student leaders who could have taken over. Considering her actions during the 1988 movement, it is doubtful that Suu Kyi would have taken over the demonstrations if she had been freed from house arrest. Without the monks to lead the marches, the protestors, mainly ordinary civilians, attempted to appeal to the international community for help by gathering in "front of Traders Hotel, where

several international agencies had offices.”<sup>218</sup> The peaceful demonstrations lasted leaderless for about two days before the protestors yielded to regime repression.

The short-lived nonviolent movement was unable to gain leverage over the powerful and united junta. Than Shwe’s repressive strategy towards his opponents combined with the provision of economic incentives to his supporters had effectively entrenched regime solidarity and military loyalty. His use of the USDA, Swan Arr Shin militia, and secret informers minimized the ability of the various opposition groups to gain strength, build rapport, or obtain external support. The NLD was powerless, especially without Suu Kyi, and some of the outlawed political groups, such as the All Burma Young Monks Union (ABYMU), waited until the protests grew in numbers before coming out of hiding. It is unknown if the government in exile, NCGUB, played a role in the nonviolent movement or not. The Saffron Revolution quickly gained momentum and was resilient for a few weeks, but its chance of attaining leverage was small. The junta’s response was strategic and organized, and the Tatmadaw and riot police attacked their opponents without hesitation to swiftly end the monk-led uprising.

The media display of beaten and forcefully disrobed monks caused international outrage, but since the junta had strong support from several other countries, it was able to ignore the outcry calling for restraint, and it forcibly ended the protest. With the advent of new communications technology in Rangoon, the world was able to witness the generals’ violent suppression of peacefully marching monks as it occurred. Foreign journalists with their cell phones and activists in cyber cafes sent images of the nonviolent movement to overseas news media. The Western states, ASEAN, and even China urged the ruling generals to practice restraint, but short of invasion, little else could be done to stop the junta from attacking the protestors. Delhi “refrained from criticizing the regime’s crackdown” while its oil minister was in Myanmar during the monk-led movement completing business negotiations for natural resources.<sup>219</sup> Despite the international attention, the help the Burmese citizens hoped for never came. The Saffron Revolution ended before it had a chance to evolve into a mass uprising capable of incapacitating the

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<sup>218</sup> “Resistance of the Monks,” 93.

<sup>219</sup> Fink, “Moment of the Monks,” 363.

state, gaining leverage, and overwhelming the regime. Without a unified opposition and national leader to help maintain the momentum, the movement lost its resilience, and with a military regime determined to stay in power, the ruling generals inhibited the movement's expansion and never lost the upper hand. Another nonviolent movement had failed to overthrow the military-led regime in Myanmar.

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## IV. CONCLUSION

The 1988 and 2007 nonviolent movements in Burma/Myanmar attempted to oust the military rulers, but they ended in failure. Why were the unarmed uprisings unsuccessful? What hindered the protestors from overthrowing the military dictatorship? The literature review provided two possible answers for the failure of the 1988 nationwide protest: Fragmented leadership caused by weak internal organization and regime repression undermined the movement's resilience, and the regime's entrenched unity prevented the opposition from gaining leverage. This thesis has presented evidence that supports both reasons given in the literature review. However, it has come to the conclusion that the leading explanation for the failure of both movements was that the regime was too strong and cohesive for the opposition to acquire enough leverage to end authoritarian rule.

### A. HYPOTHESIS 1: RESILIENCE

The disunity of the opposition leaders weakened the resilience of the 1988 nonviolent movement. The pro-democracy struggle showed that resilience combined with nationwide support proved to be a powerful force against the violent regime. The perseverance of an overwhelming number of protestors against repression helped incapacitate the state and shattered the perception of the regime's invincibility. For three weeks, Burma was without a ruling party, but the movement was also devoid of an overall leader or alternative government that could have unified the protestors and used the power of the people to end authoritarian rule. Years of oppression had kept the opposition groups separate, which had diminished their ability to converge and make collective decisions. The divergent motives and plans surfaced during the movement, which had an adverse effect on the outcome. The movement's resilience helped incapacitate the regime, but the fragmentation of its leadership prevented it from gaining leverage over the regime and caused the movement to fail.

The lack of leadership also undermined the momentum of the Saffron Revolution in 2007. The regime's incarceration of the opposition leaders prior to the start of the



movement, and the confinement of the leaders who emerged during the monk-led processions, proved to be an effective strategy in weakening the movement's resilience. The magnitude of the public's participation was insufficient to destabilize the state or cause the withdrawal of the security forces. The regime's repressive tactics ended the Saffron Revolution before the protestors had a chance to gain leverage over the regime.

## **B. HYPOTHESIS 2: LEVERAGE**

The strong unity of the regime during the 1988 and 2007 nonviolent movements enabled it to maintain its hold on power and suppress the opposition. Though the dictatorships were ineffective in preventing an unarmed uprising from occurring, they were effective in stopping the opposition from gaining leverage to overthrow the regime. The rapid escalation and massive scale of the first uprising caught the regime off guard and tested its solidarity, but the senior generals stayed united and quelled the unrest. For the second movement, the generals were well prepared to deal with the onslaught of protestors who threatened their authority, and they ended the Saffron Revolution before it became uncontrollable. In both cases, the authoritarian government was too powerful to overthrow.

## **C. CONCLUSION**

Overall, the anti-regime protests failed because the highly unified regime prevented the opposition from gaining the leverage it required to end military rule. Fragmentation of the movement's leadership weakened the 1988 uprising, but the opposition leaders' inability to obtain leverage led to its failure. The powerful regime ended the 2007 Saffron Revolution before the opposition had a chance to gain any leverage. The 1988 pro-democracy struggles showed that resilience can incapacitate a state, but both protests demonstrated that without leverage the nonviolent movements failed.

Since the end of the Saffron Revolution in 2007, Myanmar has changed politically, economically, and socially. While on its "Road Map to Discipline-Flourishing Democracy," the junta has drafted a new constitution, transformed itself into a civilian government, and changed its name to the Union Solidarity and Development Party

(USDP). It has loosened its control on civil society and the media and allowed the privatization of several state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Additionally, it has opened up the government to the opposition, so that Suu Kyi, along with other members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), and several other parties, now hold some of the parliamentary seats. The USDP has lessened the country's reliance on China. At the same time, it has increased economic and diplomatic engagements with the West, which has led to a decrease in international sanctions and an improvement in the Burmese economy.<sup>220</sup>

While it seems a lot has changed in Myanmar, the military is still in control of the state and continues to rely on purges to discourage disloyalty. The constitution guarantees that the military receives twenty-five percent of the seats in parliament, which gives them veto power in the legislative branch. It also requires that a former military officer be selected either as head of state or as one of the two vice presidents.<sup>221</sup> Additionally, it bars Suu Kyi from vying for the presidency. The USDP, which is fearful of her popularity, refuses to change the law to allow her to run for president in the 2015 elections.<sup>222</sup> Furthermore, the regime continues to purge disloyal members of the ruling party. In August 2015, when President Thein Sein perceived that Shwe Mann, “one of the three most powerful figures” in the Myanmar government, was forming ties with Suu Kyi and trying to reduce the military's control of the state, he removed him as party chairman.<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, unlike past purges, in which the regime expelled a disloyal member completely, Shwe Mann continues to be speaker of the lower house of parliament and plans to run for president. Two other influential but disenfranchised USDP members, who have quit the party, also have presidential aspirations.<sup>224</sup> As a

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<sup>220</sup> Beina Xu, “Understanding Myanmar,” *Council on Foreign Relations CFR Backgrounders*, updated 12 June 2015.

<sup>221</sup> “Myanmar's Electoral Landscape,” *International Crisis Group Asia Report 266* (28 April 2015), 7.

<sup>222</sup> Thomas Fuller, “Myanmar's Military Uses Political Force to Block Constitutional Changes,” *New York Times* (25 June 2015).

<sup>223</sup> Charlie Campbell, “Burmese President Removes Party Chief in Major Purges Before Landmark Elections,” *Time* (13 August 2015).

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*

result, there may be a power struggle for the presidency, since Thein Sein wants to remain in that position.

The Burmese populace, the NLD, and Western governments have high expectations for the November 2015 general elections, and some people are predicting that Suu Kyi's party will win the majority of the votes.<sup>225</sup> It is impossible to forecast the election results or the aftereffect, but if a nonviolent movement occurs to contest an unfavorable outcome, it may succeed in gaining leverage over the USDP. The main reason the military-led regime was able to survive the last two unarmed uprisings was because of its strong unity. Currently, the USDP is less cohesive than the previous ruling party and military junta had been. If the opposition unites, the majority of the population participates, and the nonviolent movement is resilient, it may finally gain the leverage it needs to break the cycle of movement failures in Myanmar. Social movements are complex events, and when they occur, the results are often surprising and the factors of success vary, but resilience and leverage play an important part in the outcome.

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<sup>225</sup> Tim Hume, "November Date Set For Landmark Myanmar Elections: What's at Stake?" *CNN* (12 July 2015).

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