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THE STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY IN MYANMAR/BURMA

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. BUSH: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Brookings. It's a pleasure to have you here.

Thank you all for coming out in mid-July. It's just constantly amazing to me how much interest there is even in the heat of the summer. Maybe it's for the air-conditioning; I don't know.

My name is Richard Bush. I'm the Director of the Center for East Asian Policy Studies here at Brookings, and it's my great pleasure to sort of convene this program whose title is "The Struggle for Democracy in Myanmar/Burma."

Our program is structured around a discussion of three transitions that have been occurring in Burma over the last two or three years. One is a transition from conflict towards peace, not to peace, and what I'm referring to is especially the conflict between the government and the various minorities in the country. The second is the transition from authoritarianism and military rule towards democracy. And then the third one is from a closed economy towards an open economy.

And we -- to address these issues, we have three outstanding experts, but we're not going to have them speak right away.

Before that, we have a real treat, and that is this book, "The Rebel of Rangoon: A Tale of Defiance and Deliverance," in Burma, and it's by Delphine Schrank, who is a former correspondent of *The Washington Post*, and it's an amazing book.

First of all, it's a gripping tale of how the opposition in Burma, in an environment of sort of intense repression, managed to challenge and fight against the regime.

Second, I find it to be an interesting study of the psychology and

sociology of dissent in an authoritarian situation, maybe the psychology and sociology of dissidence.

And, finally, it's just wonderfully written, which is totally unusual for a book on a sort of contemporary affairs, political subject. I mean, I can't write this way, but Delphine obviously crafted every sentence and took a long time doing so.

And so this is not a book you can speed-read. You can't even read it at the normal rate. You have to slow yourself down to get the beauty of the language. Otherwise, you miss half the book.

So, without further ado, it's my great pleasure to invite Delphine Schrank to the podium to talk about the book.

MS. SCHRANK: Thank you very much for those very kind words, Richard.

And thank you very much to Lex and to Brookings for hosting this event and using my book to discuss the more meaty issue of what's really going on in Burma now and looking forward. I really think that's very special because this book does look at a moment in time and looks backwards a bit to, hopefully, look forward, and I think that history is important.

As I was reflecting on what I might say today, I found myself re-reading a couple of lectures that Aung San Suu Kyi had delivered to the BBC in June and July 2011.

This was about six months, seven months, after she'd just been released from her last, her third stint, of house arrest.

The junta had just dissolved itself.

The new parliament that had come into being from elections in 2010 was

just starting to form.

President Thein Sein, who had been the former No. 4 of the junta of generals, who was now president, had a made first curious inaugural speech in which he'd started to use language that had been unheard of before, talking about rural poverty, talking about ethnic unity, issues that had not been discussed. But it was still rhetorical; it was not clear it was going to happen.

And Aung San Suu Kyi spoke about liberty and dissent to the BBC.

And I realized that she completely stole my thunder, as I was reading these two speeches, because she asked in those two lectures and answered very beautifully what I attempted to do in this book, which is to ask: What does it take to stand up to authoritarian rule? What kind of person makes the choice to change society while at constant risk of being taken away in the dead of night to some forgotten cell and having no idea when they'd be released?

People who had been in prison 20 years, who came out and still continued with their struggle, nonviolently -- their struggle for freedom, for democracy.

Or, even the more mundane repercussions from a life in dissidence, which is effectively to not be able to ever have a paycheck, live a normal life, go to university, fall in love, for various reasons that the book gets into.

What kind of person does that? And that was a question that struck me from my very first trip to Burma.

I was sent by *The Washington Post* a few days after the most lethal disaster to have hit a country, the biggest natural disaster in the world since the Asian tsunami in 2004, and that was tropical cyclone Nargis in 2008. So, not that long ago. And that was, if some of you may recall, it hit Burma on the night of May 2nd, 3rd, 2008,

and killed upward of 138,000 people -- killed or left missing.

At the time, the junta was dragging its feet, wasn't allowing humanitarian aid workers into the country, more or less denying the extent of the damage, and as usual, forbidding foreign journalists from going in. So when *The Post* sent me, I sort of had to go in under the radar, like most journalists at the time.

And I had been told, as I was scrambling to understand a country that I really knew nothing about before I went in, beyond what I knew, which is that only eight months before, this faceless band of generals at the time had brutally suppressed the so-called Saffron Revolution, a peaceful street protest in September 2007 led by Buddhist monks. So eight months later this cyclone hits.

And I had been told that political resistance was completely dead, that there was no such thing as -- the democracy movement had been dissolved and suppressed. Aung San Suu Kyi was still languishing under house arrest, and without her, there was nothing.

And to some extent that was true. The junta operated by fear. It was they didn't have to have 100 percent rigor to be able to control society. They had informers everywhere, the perception of informers everywhere, spies, military intelligence, special branch police.

And people self-censored. They were quiet. They were afraid.

And yet, instantly, or within a few days, very luckily perhaps through the people I met, but I started to notice that there was a spirit of defiance. There was a great spirit of dissidence. Citizens of Rangoon quietly, in very creative ways, were banding together and finding ways, in the absence of their government, in the absence of international aid workers -- you couldn't really get in. There were a few, but they were

shuttering their shops and clinics.

Bands of lawyers, actors, professional circles, whole neighborhoods of Rangoon, throwing together whatever they could. And they didn't have much -- candles, soap, blankets. And getting it down to the delta, to the storm-ravaged zone, the most -- one of the poorest areas of Burma, which had been terribly hit by the storm.

And over the next few months these groups stayed together, and I started to realize that there was this web of community trying to oppose the regime somehow or helping their own people or finding ways to get around the many, many restrictions on peaceful assembly, on gathering together, and on helping people.

And it was much wider than that.

So what Aung San Suu Kyi's response to the question of what kind of person is able to endure these kinds of difficulties and go on and still show up at the NLD office, her party that won elections in 1990 -- and then most of the leadership was thrown in prison, and over the next 20 years they still endured.

The kind of person that does that -- she quotes Max Weber on three attributes of decisive importance to the politician: passion, a sense of responsibility, and a sense of proportion.

Or put another way, as I found, a sort of sense of duty and a compulsion in how the needs of their community or their country outweigh their own.

In this case, the sort of burning need for liberty.

And what that means at a more granular level to them is the right to carry a USB key and not be thrown in prison for seven years, the right to not have their land confiscated, really very basic rights and freedoms. These were not abstract concepts that people at all levels were trying to struggle for and still are.

And I think all of this is relevant to talk about now, particularly now, because these are the people who are taking advantage of the political space that has opened up in the past two, three years.

And they're the people that are pushing, I think. I would submit they're pushing the reform process forward. It's sort of the law of intended consequences.

The junta put in place a parliamentary system, a quasi-civilian government. It kept a 25 percent bloc of seats for the military; 60 percent of the rest of the seats went to the military-backed party. The 2010 elections were very rigged.

And, yet, in the space since there have been a lot of changes. The parameters of the struggle for human rights and democracy in Burma have radically changed, and you're seeing constantly these wildfire protests all over the country.

Farmers standing up for their rights, protesting a copper mine, a Chinese-backed copper mine that would destroy the site of a natural heritage site and a sacred Buddhist site.

Factory workers just yesterday -- this has been going on for quite some time. Factory workers striking for minimum wage to be raised.

Or, students -- students have always been at any increment in Burma. Despite the destruction of universities, students have always tried to gather together. They've always been at the forefront of fighting for their rights in Burma and recently have been on the streets protesting education laws, knowing they're going to get thrown back into jail.

And a lot of these people are sort of dismissed now maybe as possibly radicals, but I think they're symptomatic of a society that has over time been taught, or learned, to articulate its grievances despite the fact that they were living under one of the

most repressive, highly censored regimes in the world.

And I think as we sort of open this up and discuss what's going to happen looking forward in Burma, or Myanmar - - I call it Burma because the democracy activists who are at the center of this book prefer Burma. They said to me, we prefer Burma; we prefer Rangoon.

And those of you who may know, in 1989, the junta, the SLORC that had just taken power, had changed the name to Myanmar, but democracy activists prefer to keep calling it Burma, as did the U.S. government and various holdouts. Anyway.

The party to beat, it seems, in 2015 is the National League for Democracy which has been, I think, completely underestimated for the past -- well, for several years, as if it achieved nothing. It won in a huge landslide in 1990, and the results were neglected. And now the speculation is that they will win again.

And why is that? Well, I think there are three things that I would take from this movement that I've written about and particular individuals who were at the center of it.

It's, first, that there's great longevity to them. This is not a movement that was born yesterday. Military rule -- there was a military coup in 1962, and it came on top of 10 years of parliamentary democracy. At that, this is a multi-generational movement.

So there's a character in this book, one of the chief protagonists, Win Tin, who passed away some months ago. He emerged from 19 years in prison at 79 and became again the senior strategist of the party, with a great memory of the parliamentary democracy days. He had come of age during then.

And a lot of the deputies of the NLD, they remember this. They're not -- they're not recovering -- they're not adding an idea of democracy that was not already --

I'm articulating that badly.

Burma has had an experience of democracy, and they look to their own people, and they look to their own writers, to explain that to the wider population. So that's one thing -- that they've evolved over time; they've learned.

So the younger generations, who are now at the forefront of pushing their government forward, they've learned from their elders. They've learned from their own history.

And there was a young activist I met. I was talking to activists. I was in Burma during the Arab Spring. And a young activist who appears in the book under the pseudonym Glimmer [ph], who had been in prison, and he -- I asked him what he thought of what was going on in Egypt.

And he said to me at the time, and I thought it was very insightful. It was at the time of September 2011. It wasn't clear what was going to happen in Egypt.

And he said, "Oh, you know, I'm really proud of the Egyptians."

I said, "What do you mean?"

He said, "Well, no matter what happens now" -- and you kind of had a sense that there might be a counterrevolution in Egypt. Things would be bad. The military would come back, as it has.

"No matter what happens, the people now know that they have the power to mobilize and to stand up and to show their collective power."

And, you know, in a way what he was saying was that Egypt, the Middle East -- and I won't get into that. I don't know much about it. But they're where Burma was in 1988.

In Burma in 1988, the activists who are now in their 50s and 60s, they will often say to me, "Well, you know, in 1988 we stood up."

In 1998 was a huge uprising in Burma -- millions of people on the street to kick out the tyrant, General Ne Win, and the regime that he upheld. And at the time they were shouting slogans for democracy and human rights, but they had no idea what it meant.

They were just -- but over time, they learned to understand what that meant, and to go out and teach people their rights, and to help people articulate their grievances and find other ways than just street protest. And one of those ways was to build a reliable political party that they upheld through all these years, and that was the National League for Democracy which still endures. So, longevity.

And I'll be -- I'll try to be less longwinded now.

The second is creativity because these are people who had to endure, who had to -- who were fighting for democracy or just trying to achieve the ends of getting their country to freedom through unbelievable constraints.

The opening chapter of this book is the central protagonist getting chased out of Rangoon by an intelligence agent, for no reason that he knows, no reason that's really very clear.

And the second chapter is his friend-rival who teaches rights by day and does something else by night, more subversive. This young man is picked up out of an internet cafe, thrown into a detention center, and doesn't know why.

Those are the kind of things they were enduring, and yet, they were still continuing and finding oblique ways.

So now that there's more space, they're finding more creative ways.

So those protests that I just was talking about earlier -- the farmers, the factory workers striking for minimum wage, the farmers for that copper mine, when you talk to them, it turns out, well, like they're -- these are spontaneous protests, but they're -- they've been helped by more professional activists who've maybe, in the factory workers' case, given them a bit of money so that they can strike, so that they have a bit of time to strike, or the factory workers have been helped with more polished arguments.

So there's that; they're finding ways around whatever constraints are still imposed on them by a country that is still not yet a democracy.

And the third thing is that they're a force to be reckoned with. They've been underestimated, as I said. The NLD was considered to be a dead letter, just very old, uncool as they're called, in a very small office.

And who -- and Aung San Suu Kyi, herself. There was chatter outside the country and even a bit -- well, not from the Burmese themselves -- that somehow she had become irrelevant because she had been isolated for so long, which was the junta's intent. They had kept her not even in a prison but under house arrest, which was a way of sort of cutting her off from the people.

Well, as it turns, it's not the case at all. As has always been the case whenever she was released, or even when the NLD has gone out and campaigned for itself, people pour out. Pour out. And these are people that were terrified before, couldn't talk openly in tea shops.

And I saw this the last time that the NLD contested an election, which was the very small bi-election of 2012 in which 48 seats initially were up for grabs in a national parliamentary of -- I forget the number. I think it's over 1,000. But it was less than 10 percent of seats.

And people were saying at the time -- even members of the NLD -- "Oh, no one will come. They're only coming for Aung San Suu Kyi," with whom there's a bit of cult of personality around her. "We are nothing without Aung San Suu Kyi."

But I followed the new candidates that the NLD put forward -- young people who had been in prison, old senior people who had won in 1990 and then been thrown in jail for 18 years. What was remarkable was how they improvised and how people poured out just hear what they had to say.

And someone put on a rock concert, Phyu Phyu Thin, in the middle of Rangoon, and people came.

And there was a town hall meeting in the middle of a field in Langhko [ph] District, a rural area, and people held a minute of silence for the revolutionary -- for the day of revolution. Not the day of revolution. What's it called? I'm forgetting the name, but anyway.

Again, it's difficult to appreciate how significant this was in a country where people had not been able to talk prior to this.

So I'll leave it at that, and I'll stop talking because there's much more to say, which you'll have to say. But I think it is significant to look back in the history and not forget as these people now are moving forward and they can't really hold the people that are still in power accountable so much.

Thank you very much.

(Applause)

MR. BUSH: So thank you very much, Delphine. If I could ask you and Ted and Priscilla and Lex to come up to the stage.

Thank you, Delphine, for whetting our appetite for "A Rebel from

Rangoon." There are copies on sale outside, and I do recommend it.

We're now going to move to a discussion of what I referred to as "three transitions."

And first, I'd like to focus on conflict towards peace, and we're privileged to have Priscilla Clapp as our resource person on that.

Priscilla is a retired career foreign service officer. She served in a variety of countries on a variety of topics, but highly relevant for our subject today, she was the Chief of Mission in Rangoon/Yangon from 1999 to 2002 and the permanent Chargé d'Affaires. Currently, she's a Senior Advisor to the U.S. Institute for Peace and the Asia Society. And a long time ago, I don't know when, she was a research associate at the Brookings Institution.

MS. CLAPP: I left 40 years ago this month.

MR. BUSH: Well, you --

(Laughter)

MR. BUSH: So, Priscilla, please give us a status report on the effort of the government and the various minority groups around Burma's periphery in bringing about peace and some stability on that fault of the society.

MS. CLAPP: Well, the good news is that this new government when it came in, in 2011, almost immediately set about trying to craft a negotiation with the long-running ethnic armed group insurgencies that have been going on in the country since the time of independence, and that had not been done by any of the previous military regimes. They tried to separate them and play one against the other.

And they began to address -- they did get them together. They did a series of individual ceasefires, bilateral ceasefires, and then tried to bring them together

into a single national ceasefire. And they got quite a long way, but in the process they began to address the underlying problems. And it's the first in history, but it's going to be a long time to be resolved.

The bad news is that they haven't reached their goal and they're not likely to do that before the elections; that is, the goal of a national ceasefire.

And the other part of the bad news is actually more conflict now. It's not necessarily getting better.

It got better for a while, but the conflict with the Kachin reignited as soon as this new government came into power, after more than 10 years of peace in the Kachin State. And that's the heart of the problem really because that's where most of the resource wealth of the country resides, and they're fighting over territory and resources. The army wants to control that, and the Kachin want to control it, and they haven't been able to reach any kind of agreement on that. So they do not have a ceasefire agreement with the Kachin.

And, meanwhile, fighting has broken out on the -- further down on the China border with the Kokang, and that's been very serious.

Where it's calmer now is in the Karen area and the Mon area where there were really long-running rebellions going, and we're hoping that that will stick.

Anyway, it's going to be a long process. It will continue into the next government and the one after that probably. At least the issues are being joined.

MR. BUSH: Were you surprised at all the trouble and conflict that has occurred between the government and the Burman majority and Burma's Muslims?

MS. CLAPP: Oh, you mean the national -- the radicals.

MR. BUSH: Yeah.

MS. CLAPP: It's not a new problem. It's new to most of the world, but when I was there, there was a Rohingya problem. It was pretty serious, but it was -- it was not known to the rest of the world.

There were outbreaks of fighting in most of the cities between Muslims and Buddhists, but it happened really between, you know, imams and monks. It was the clergy themselves that were involved in sparking the fighting.

I am surprised in a way that the government hasn't acted more resolutely in bringing it under control, but knowing that place I have a feeling that they have been doing things quietly because there hasn't been any further violence for quite a while now.

And the elections will be the big test. I don't think there's going to be a lot of effort with this problem before the elections, but I'm hoping that after the elections the new government will take it on. There has to be some -- they have to address hate speech, among other things.

MR. BUSH: Let's move to the elections. This is a very important milestone. And what are the prospects?

MS. CLAPP: The test, the official test, that's being cited now is not "free and fair;" it's "credible, inclusive, and transparent."

And I would say that, so far, we're off to a good start. In the last week, few days, there have been some announcements about the date of the elections, the 8th of November, and that is a very good sign because it means that all of these rumors about postponing the elections for one reason or another were not true. They have set a date for the elections. They are planning to move forward.

They have published voter lists. They're trying to clean them up. I don't think they'll get them clean because it's a massive task, but they're trying. At least they're

giving it a try.

They're trying to be transparent. They have reached agreement with civil society groups on monitoring the elections; they have a code of conduct for them. They have a code of conduct for international monitors to monitor the election, not to monitor, but to observe the elections. They have guidelines established with the press for covering the elections.

So they've put in place a whole series of rules of the road to try and prevent people going off the reservation and starting to cause problems that would then create a crackdown because the security forces, unfortunately, are not very sophisticated. They know one way of stopping things, and that's by force.

They are also working on a strategy for security, and they've brought all of the security forces together with the Union Election Commission to develop a strategy. And they have international and U.N. and other advisors, and they're helping them with experience in other countries.

So they're -- in other words, they're doing the right thing. Whether it will turn out being the right thing in the end, we don't know.

I say that the organization that has the most capacity to spoil these elections is the military. So if the elections go forward, and they are relatively credible, inclusive and transparent, and they produce the results that we expect, which is a big win for the NLD -- I'm not saying a massive majority win but at least a big win -- then I think it tells us that the military is willing to continue moving forward. And that's good news.

MR. BUSH: Okay. Thank you very much.

Let's segue from the elections themselves to the broader process of democratization.

Ted Piccone is my colleague here at Brookings and a good friend. He's been Deputy Director of the Foreign Policy Program for a while. For his pains, he was also Acting Vice President for Foreign Policy, and the Acting Director, but he was able to put that burden down.

His passion and his long-term interest is democracy and human rights. He worked on those issues throughout the Clinton administration.

So, Ted, stepping back and looking at what has happened in Myanmar/Burma over the last few years, in the context of political transitions that have occurred elsewhere, what's your gut feeling?

MR. PICCONE: Sure. Well, first of all, congratulations to Delphine for such a remarkable book. It really is a beautifully written and very inspiring story that we don't often hear, and told in such inspiring prose.

So I'm looking at Burma/Myanmar. I'm not sure if we're going to keep going back and forth between the two. I once was scolded when I was trying to -- I was running an NGO trying to get U.N. accreditation, and we were told we could not use the word "Burma" if we wanted to get our NGO accreditation. So I learned how to say "Myanmar," but out of Delphine's remark about what the subject of this discussion is, I'll say "Burma."

So I think Burma has some natural advantages compared to other cases of democratic transition around the world. We've heard about some of them already this morning; also, some great challenges which have actually inspired, I think in some ways, the push for change.

The advantages, in part, are personified in the career and the place that Aung San Suu Kyi holds in -- not only in Burma but around the world. Not every country

that's trying to move toward democracy such an icon that -- you know, her lineage, her quiet force. But also, the fact that her party won elections in 1990 really made for a really powerful case for why there should be a continued push both within the country and, of course, internationally, to honor those elections and to allow her and her party to come to power. It's taken many years, but we will get to that point.

Also, I think the force of the opposition, as Delphine talked about. That it already had experience with democracy, it already was organized, and despite all of the efforts by the military regime continued driving forward is a very important advantage.

The economic situation, which we'll hear more from Lex, you know, the very deep poverty, that was also part of the movement -- was to address these really terrible conditions that most people were living in.

And that is also a human rights agenda, we have to remember. You know, in this country, we think narrowly about human rights. We think about civil and political rights, but for most people in the world human rights is very much also about economic and social rights, the right to a standard of living that is fair and reasonable.

So I would say those are some quick points on the situation in Burma that are interesting.

The one key issue, though, when you think about other cases is every situation is unique; this is an obvious point. Every transition is nonlinear. There will be steps forward and steps backward. And any moment that you take a snapshot you may think that it's going terribly and it's going to fall apart, and then you have other moments where it looks like it's inevitable and irreversible.

And you know, looking at a variety of cases, there are some indicators I would look at very closely.

One is the whole question of constitutional reform. That is a key ingredient for allowing a society to move forward based on a new framework, a new set of rules.

And I think this is an unfinished process in Burma. Even the last couple months, the efforts made within -- of course, I think it was inevitable, the outcome of the debates in parliament to change the constitution to allow Aung San Suu Kyi to actually run for president and some other measures that were rejected by the military-controlled parliament, not surprising, but it creates an ongoing process and effort to get to that point of greater constitutional reform.

And I think in cases where there's been a more successful transition, getting a written constitution, particularly the more inclusive and consultative -- the better. Brazil would be a good example of this.

The role of the military in politics. You know, you cannot have a successful transition if you don't have civilian democratic control of the military. It's that simple.

And so Burma, obviously, is not there by any means.

But we know of other cases where there was a staged transition. Take Chile, for example, where written into the constitution were certain prerogatives for the military that are just now in Chile being finally removed. Even though Chile's transition to democracy was really consolidated several years ago, the vestiges of the role of the military took many, many years to remove.

Argentina took a very different path. It was a much clearer pull-the-wound-out, and eventually many military junta leaders in jail. But it took time. There was an amnesty law adopted.

Transitional justice does take time, and it's not an absolute necessity in every democracy or democratic transition. I'm not sure how it will be handled in the case of Burma, but it is a key way in which you can manage the demand for justice in a way that allows the democratic process to go forward.

I mean, look at the case of Turkey. I mean, Turkey has taken many years to finally remove the military largely from politics. And there is -- you could even say that Erdoğan has gone too far in using his demand for greater civilian control of the military, an important principle, to really weaken not just the military but other forces of the opposition in Turkey.

But another interesting and important ingredient in the Turkey case is the role of the European Union. I mean, this was the key criterion for Turkey's candidacy to the European Union -- was to have greater civilian control of the military. And Erdoğan very effectively used that, and not just on the military front, but on other fronts, to push a reform process at home.

You know, since I'm on that topic, let me turn to the role of the international community in a variety of different cases. You know, obviously, in the transitions in Central and Eastern European the accession process to the E.U. was critically important.

I think in the case of Burma you have a variety of actors who have played different roles over time. Complimentary, I would say, when you step back. It didn't look that way at the time.

But you know, you had the U.S. and the European Union playing a very aggressive, punitive type of role.

You had the ASEAN states that, you know, evolved over time in their

thinking. I mean, they understood that for Burma to be a fully respected member of ASEAN it needed to change its ways, and they really did organize a lot of pressure on ASEAN, in the ASEAN way. You know, it was a softer engagement process, but you had forces particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, in parliaments, in civil society, that were organized and committed and pushing for ASEAN to take a more aggressive stand.

It looked rather soft from the outside. Okay, they denied Burma the chairmanship of ASEAN; they delayed it. But that was important, I think, in getting the regime to rethink their role.

Of course, you have India and China.

India changed its position on Burma, was with the United States in a much more punitive approach. And they quickly realized that that wasn't going to get them anywhere given the open door for China, and they didn't want to cede so much power to their rival China. So India, within a couple years, switched toward an engagement policy.

But they insist that they did not forget the democracy and human rights agenda. They gave a lot of support to the opposition, including physical materiel support, safety within Indian borders, which was important. And over time they have built up a certain relationship that has led to technical assistance on elections, on constitution-drafting, et cetera. So India has played an important, interesting role.

And then, of course, it's involved the United Nations, which some would say was rather feckless at certain times. You have a special rapporteur from the United Nations who has visited the country, been brushed aside many times, but nonetheless allowed for the international community to stay involved, and that has worked in other cases as well.

I think my last point would be on the issue of religion and ethnic national conflicts in Burma, a much more difficult scenario for them but may be a force that allows them to be inclusive and a set of common rules that people can live together under one umbrella, and I think that's actually -- could be a force for positive change.

MR. BUSH: Thank you very much.

We turn now to Lex Rieffel who's also a colleague. He's a Nonresident Senior Fellow here at Brookings, and his work has focused on Myanmar for the last seven years.

He worked for a long time in the U.S. government, in USAID and the Treasury Department. His focus before he found Myanmar was Indonesia, but he's written several things on Myanmar since then. He had an edited volume published by the Brookings Press in 2010, co-authored a very good study on international aid to Myanmar, and has -- now just in the last few days had published a paper with the -- it's the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore, on improving Myanmar's state-owned enterprises.

So, Lex, I spoke of moving from a closed economy towards an open one. What -- give us a status report on that.

MR. RIEFFEL: Richard, you mentioned that I've been examining the Myanmar economy for seven years. I've also been following economic development in East Asia for 50 years.

And the first point I would make is that Myanmar is in East Asia. It's an East Asian country. And we have seen over the past 50 years some amazing, incredible economic development in East Asia. And there is a formula; there is a path, to prosperity.

And the question for me from the beginning was: Is Myanmar going to follow this path? Is it capable of following the path? Can it have the high growth that the other countries have had; and if not, why not?

So I -- we have this sort of structure of the "three transitions." As I look at the "three transitions," I come away with the feeling that the Thein Sein government, over the last four years, has made more progress with the economic transition than either the peace transition or the democracy transition.

What is the evidence, and what are the implications for the peace transition and the democratic -- democracy transition?

First piece of evidence is on April 1, 2012. This is a year after President Thein Sein was inaugurated. The country abandoned its fixed exchange rate system. The kyat, the Myanmar currency, was the world's most overvalued currency. It was just incredibly overvalued, and the exchange rate system was a total mess. They moved to a managed float system which is the kind of exchange rate system that the East Asian countries have used very successfully in their economic rise.

And this, the exchange rate, is viewed by many economists as the single most important price in an economy. So getting that right was a huge step. And I don't know anybody who expected the Thein Sein government to move as quickly and as strongly in this direction so quickly.

Now since then they've implemented this exchange rate system quite well, and they've supported it with some important legislation like a new central bank law.

The second piece of evidence I submit is that in mid-2013, just 2 years ago, the government awarded licenses, mobile telephone licenses, to Telenor of Norway and Ooredoo of Qatar. These two companies are rolling out mobile telephone networks

that will bring access to mobile telephones from less than 10 percent -- less than 10 percent of the population in 2011. No, in 2013. Less than 10 percent in 2013 to possibly more than 70 percent in 2018, 5 years.

I mean, this is an incredibly fast rollout.

SIM cards, which cost around $2,000 in 2011 now can be purchased for less than $2.

And I think this rollout following a process that came close to meeting international standards for procurement, international bidding and so forth. This rollout at 3G and 4G technology, which means that every person who has a smartphone will have access to the internet, I think this is going to have a large beneficial impact on the economic life of Myanmar and quite possibly be a positive factor in the peace transition and political -- and the political democratic transition.

But I can't say all is going well in the economy. There are two, a couple of things. Three things I would mention.

One is the resource curse. This country has one of the world's worst resource curses, and it is clearly complicating the political transition.

The Thein Sein government signed up for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. This is a tremendous--this is the gold standard for managing a country's resource curse, but we're not there yet. There are vested interests that could stand in the way of actually meeting this, actually conforming to these standards, meeting these standards which they are supposed to do next year, early next year.

The agriculture sector provides the livelihood for 70 percent of the population. There has been almost no reform in the agriculture in the last -- under the Thein Sein government. And this is absolutely against the formula of the East Asian

countries -- the rest of East Asia where high growth started with raising household incomes in the rural sector by removing obstacles to productive employment, productive farming in the rural sector.

And then there's the state enterprise sector. I won't bore you with details. You can read my paper.

Finally, I want to say a word about the foreign aid because of this study that I undertook with Jim Fox a couple of years ago. This was the first comprehensive assessment of foreign aid to the Thein Sein government.

We were impressed by the steps that the government had taken to manage the donors, the foreign donors, and to establish country ownership of its program.

We were disappointed, however, to see lots of evidence that the donor agencies were still making the same mistakes that the OECD had tried to correct when it adopted the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness 10 years ago. So there's a risk that too much of the wrong kind of aid will be a contributing factor to Myanmar's political and democratic transitions, and that would be one more tragedy in Myanmar's sad history.

MR. BUSH: Thank you very much.

Delphine, I want to give you the opportunity to comment on anything anybody has said. You don't have to, but.

MS. SCHRANK: Well, let me. Actually, something Ted said I think is very significant, and we were just talking about it before we walked in here -- how in the rest of the world, or in countries that are going through this, the economic and social rights are fundamental to what they're aspiring towards, and it's difficult to divorce the two.

So even to talk about the economic changes that are happening in Burma, in Myanmar now, if that trickles down to the rural population, to the general population -- this is a country that over 75 percent, I believe, still are rural and have been living barely above subsistence levels. And the gap between poor and rich is massive, and the rich are very, very small. There's a middle class intellectually, but financially, it really just means they can have an extra helping of pork maybe twice a week.

I mean, there's a very slim difference, but it's felt.

But the main motivating force for people who consider themselves or call themselves dissidents, who became part of the democracy movement -- I would constantly ask them, "Well, why do you do this? Why do you take these risks?"

And the constant refrain I would hear from people who hadn't finished high school, who left university, who had been in prison, was they would look around say, "Well, there's the poverty. There's the poverty of my country, the poverty down the road, my poverty. The poverty of the people around me."

Poverty. The economic question. And knowing, of course, in this instance, that the poverty of their country, surrounded by countries that have leaped forward and progressed, had a lot to do with the mismanagement -- well, I don't know if it was completely the mismanagement -- of successive military rulers that had impoverished the country.

So I think the two are very, very tied together.

MR. BUSH: Okay.

MR. PICCONE: Can I just comment on that? Because we got to talking comparisons and since I'm doing a comparative thing on Cuba and why do we not see more activism in Cuba toward democracy. And it's largely because the model they have

followed has provided economic and social benefits to the vast general population with very concrete results in terms of the quality of life in Cuba.

MS. CLAPP: And communism works?

MR. PICCONE: Well, I'm not saying communism works.

(Laughter)

MR. PICCONE: Communism is a huge sacrifice for other rights. I mean, it's an impoverishment of a different kind. And -- you know. So I'm not in any way trying to say that --

MS. CLAPP: It was a joke.

MR. PICCONE: Oh, it's okay. I mean, you hear it from people.

But I think it does point to the fact that the democratization process in Cuba is so slow and delayed and will take a lot more time.

MR. BUSH: Let's open it up so that you can ask your questions, and there's just a couple of rules. I will sort of call on people, and once I've called on you, wait for the mic, identify yourself please, identify which of the panelists you're directing your question to, and keep your question brief. They're all smart people. They can figure out the point of your question.

So who would like to ask the first question? Don't be shy.

Yes.

QUESTION: I used to work at Brookings, and I never asked a question.

(Laughter)

QUESTION: I'm Linda Rotunno, and I run an international NGO that does -- we work with political leaders around the world, and we work a lot in Myanmar.

And I spent some time actually in Naypyidaw, just chatting with the

foreign minister, which was super interesting because he talked a lot about China and the building of that crazy capital and really how at some point they recognized that they were going to be totally subsumed by China if they didn't open up to the world.

And I actually see that as kind of really the impetus of what's going on, and none of you really talked -- touched on China, and I think it's a -- you know, I'd just like to get your feeling, your sense of its importance in what's happening with Myanmar now across all the spectrums -- economic, peace, prosperity.

Thanks.

MR. BUSH: Priscilla has volunteered to answer that question.

MS. CLAPP: Yeah. They share a very long border with China. China has an enormous impact on the country. China sort of looks at the country as a province of China, in their sphere of influence.

And during the final years of the military regime, particularly the last 10 years I think, the generals became very uncomfortable with the degree to which they had become dependent upon China's protection in the international community, and they knew they had to break that.

And they also were becoming much too dependent on China, economically. China was corrupting their economy in many ways, and they saw no way out of it.

So they knew they had to change their relations with the rest of the world, and in order to do that they knew what the rules were -- political reform, economic reform.

And I would say that that was a major factor but not the only one.

They -- Burma and its leadership, for most of history but particularly in

modern history, have been very good at managing its relations with the Great Powers and keep equidistant relations, correct relations with the Great Powers, and that is what they wanted to restore with this transition because it had gotten all out of whack. So they would like to be equidistant from Japan, China, U.S. Well, let's say U.S. and Europe.

And ASEAN is one of the mechanisms through which they manage their protection, I would say, from China, from being overpowered by China.

They do not want to become a battleground in U.S.-Chinese relations.

And I think it would be a mistake for us to look at this, at our policy, as a counter-China policy in Burma because we come -- we have -- the U.S. and China have different sets of interests in the country, and there's no reason why both sets can't somehow work together.

But I think it's a correction, a major correction that's going on in Burma's foreign policy, and I think they all agree with it.

But it's interesting to watch what's happening now politically because the potential. All of the leadership, the four main leaders in the country have all made the trek to China. They've all been meeting with Xi Jinping.

And China is having to reckon with the development of a multi-party democracy on its border. So it has internal implications for China as well, and that will be interesting to watch.

MR. BUSH: Thanks.

Did you want to take a minute to say something about the book?

MS. CLAPP: Oh, yes, absolutely. I've read the book, and I think it's terrific. It is, as Delphine said, a piece of history that's missing in all of the things that have been written about Burma. It's the hidden -- it's a story of the hidden part of the

revolution that's been going on in the country for a while.

During the military years, information was so hard to get. The place was so closed down that we couldn't see really what was going on inside. And I think Delphine has done a great job in filling that gap.

Thank you.

MS. SCHRANK: Thank you very much.

MR. BUSH: Lex, did you want to say something about China?

MR. RIEFFEL: Very quickly. One of the most interesting facts about this country, for me, is that it has five neighboring countries. Today, even today, there is not one single highway or railroad that connects this country to any of its neighbors.

Opening up is certainly going to bring highways and railroads, but it will be interesting to see the order in which they are built.

And I think the first, clearly, is going to be Thailand. There's a highway, sort of. There are highways under construction now with Thailand.

I think China -- the highway and railway links to China may be the last, but one of the more interesting ones is China and India have talked about building a road to connect these two countries through Myanmar.

And so how this plays out is going to be quite interesting.

MR. BUSH: Okay, next question. Okay, right here, and then I'll come to Mike and -- okay.

QUESTION: Thank you for your presentations.

My name is Emily Vargas-Barón and I direct the RISE Institute. I've been working --

MR. BUSH: Can you move the mic a little closer to you?

QUESTION: Oh. I've been working for the last three years in Myanmar in multi-sectoral policy planning, and I was struck that you didn't mention very much, except for poverty, the dimension of social development because the very -- I would say the weak underbelly of the country is the status of the people and the services that they receive.

During the time of the military there was virtually no social development budget, and slowly now there is a growing budget, but it's still woefully behind what it should be.

And I wanted to ask you how you see during the coming years the social development of the country developing over time?

Thank you.

MR. BUSH: I guess that's to Lex.

MR. RIEFFEL: This is an excellent question, very difficult to answer.

One of the things we see is a large amount of the budget goes to the military, and we have to believe that even more goes to the military than what we see in the budget and is published in the budget.

Everybody agrees that more needs to be spent on education and health and the social sectors.

The important thing to understand in my mind is that -- the important thing to understand is the limited, what we call, state capacity, the ability of the government to actually implement and provide services to the population. There are few countries in the world where state capacity is lower than in this country. And what this creates is a huge tension with expectations because at the same time there are fewer countries in the world where expectations are higher we have a huge gap between

expectations of what the government should be doing and the ability of the government to do it.

And this is where -- this is my -- one my core concerns because I just -- I wish the world would expect less of this country and help the government build the capacity because right now there's a lot of aid. For example, there's more aid, possibly more aid, going to develop the capacity of civil society than there is to the government. Civil society can't deliver public services; only the government can.

MR. BUSH: Mike?

QUESTION: This sort of follows up -- Mike Mosettig, PBS Online News Hour.

This sort of follows up on the previous question. I made my first trip there earlier this winter, and not being any kind of expert about the country, and I was really surprised at the potential wealth there in resources and things like that and now, of course, this incredible amount of foreign investment.

How many generations are we talking about until this starts getting spread a bit better? Because also, with the incredible wealth, I saw these kids in the tea shop who were virtual serfs.

So, again, are we talking decades, generations, what, until we see a more evening out of wealth and wealth distribution in the country?

MR. BUSH: Anybody? Lex?

MR. RIEFFEL: Let me just make a couple comments.

One is certainly more than one generation.

One of the comparisons that I find most interesting is with Indonesia. Indonesia began its transition to democracy in 1998. That's like 17 years ago.

How far has it gotten? How far has it gotten, for example, in removing the military or in reforming the military?

How effective is its democracy? And, here, I might have some sort of different opinions with Ted because, I mean, I have friends in Indonesia who say the Indonesian parliament is the biggest single obstacle to progress in that country.

Is the parliament, is the next parliament in Myanmar, going to be an obstacle to progress or an engine of progress? I don't know.

MR. PICCONE: I would say that in a number of the cases that I've been looking at the problem of instability, whether it's coming from oppositions in parliament or otherwise, is one of the most difficult hurdles to overcome.

And if you look at the early years of democratic transition in a country like Indonesia, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa, these countries went through enormous periods of hyperinflation, of economic collapse, of monetary instability, et cetera. You go down the whole line.

And now after a period in which kind of the politics became consolidated and there was more of a loyal opposition and a party in power, more inclusive, things -- then the economy settled down and really took off. But it really required both the political and the economic transitions to be aligned in a way.

And, of course, we're in a process of tremendous global change and different advantages that Burma has and will benefit from, but they do need to get those things aligned to really take off.

MR. BUSH: Other comments? No? Okay.

I saw the women right here in the black and white dress, yes, and then I'll come over here.

QUESTION: Hi. Thank you for the presentation.

I'm Nora. I'm a research intern with the Foreign Policy Initiative, and I have two questions.

The first one is for Priscilla. I was wondering if you could comment on like why the specific animosity toward Rohingya because, as you said, like the ceasefire agreement with all these other ethnic groups were also ethnically different, religiously different, linguistically different, and you still see the government recognizing them as a legitimate ethnicity, but then they don't accord that same, I guess, acknowledgement towards Rohingya. And I was wondering if you could comment on why is it, specifically, that Rohingya don't receive that.

And the other one is for Delphine. Like you see that you mentioned the Saffron Revolution and then you see how it's kind of there's -- now we see things like the 969 Movement and like the Mabatha. And I was wondering. Is it different aspects of the clergy, or is it a different sentiment that comes with the political opening of 2010?

Thank you.

MS. CLAPP: The ethnic groups -- the ethnic minorities that are recognized as native ethnic minorities in the country are part of the official 135.

The Rohingya are on the border with Bangladesh. They got incorporated into the country. By the way, the British drew the border. They were -- it all dates back to the colonial period. They are considered to be immigrants, foreigners, not native, not a native ethnic group.

One of the problems in the debate right now, internally, is that some of the more radical voices among the Rohingya are trying to claim the right to be a native ethnic group, and that is very strongly resisted by everyone else in the country. It's not

just the Burmans; it's everybody. They do not consider them to be a native ethnic group.

Now during the colonial period a lot of Muslim inhabitants of the country were imported into the country from the rest of the Indian Raj because Burma was part of the Raj. They came from what today is India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. And they, even today, are still considered to be immigrants in the country and not a native population. The Rohingya fit in that group. That's why they are not considered the same as the other ethnic groups.

MR. BUSH: Delphine?

MS. SCHRANK: I think the question you asked was an excellent one.

It seems that the monks who had mobilized for peace, for loving-kindness -- they were marching for loving-kindness, and then it sort of took on a political character, the Saffron Revolution. And now it seems that the monks are leading the charge of attacking, committing pogroms Muslims at large and the Rohingya.

Wirathu, who is one of the main spiritual leaders of the 969 Movement, which is the ultra-nationalist Buddhist movement that is leading the charge, I met with him. He was in prison during the time of the Saffron Revolution for incitement to hatred against Muslims. So he wasn't part of that.

And other abbots, I think, at the head of the 969 Movement, as far as I knew, were not part of the Saffron Revolution.

At the lower levels, it's not clear.

I think, as Priscilla said, this is a longstanding problem. This is not something that has suddenly come. It's come to the fore, to our attention, because the other great struggles have sort of seemed to dissolve or change.

What is very troubling is that this has taken such a nasty turn, where

people pack out the sermons of Ashin Wirathu, who speaks in the name of Buddhism, but actually there's no -- or him and the other abbots of the 969 Movement. As far as I've been able to gather, there's no Buddhist text that they can cite to support their animosity towards Muslims, towards Rohingya.

It's just boilerplate racism that's been used a lot there: They're raping our women. They are the greatest force for evil in the country. They're going to get rid of the Buddhist character of the country.

The Muslim population represents about 4 percent of the Rohingya, about a million out of a population of about 51 million.

So -- but the question then about, you know, is it different elements of the clergy or not? I mean, that's a mystery that remains unsolved, of sort of whom the people are that have been -- well, I'm talking about two separate issues, but they're kind of related.

On the one hand, there's the violence against the Rohingya, which tends to be in the Rakhine State, predominantly by the Rakhine people who are victimized and feel -- and that's where most of the Rohingya are concentrated.

But then the Muslim population -- the Rohingya are, of course, Muslim. But then the Muslim population at large within the country are also attacked with the rhetoric of the 969 Movement.

And who those people are that have actually physically attacked is a question that needs to be asked within every separate town where this has happened.

And in the two places that I went, Meiktila, which is one of the first, there was a massacre of the Muslim population, where their houses were burned down, where 826 houses were burned down. You could see it from the satellite imagery. It was really

shocking. And this was in March 2013, if I'm not mistaken.

And then there was a sort of line of attacks against Muslims in the mainland part of the country, sort of hewing mysteriously to the highway that led down towards Rangoon.

And I was in Okkan, a little town about 50 miles north of Rangoon, within hours of the last attack, and the cowsheds that had belonged to Muslims were still smoldering, and Muslims who had been living there for generations were in hiding.

It was very troubling.

And the question was: Had the 969 Movement come there? And, yes, they had. Wirathu had made a sermon, and a few days later there was this.

And who had committed it? It seemed that people had plotted in advance the houses that belonged to the Muslims. It wasn't difficult because for years the government and officialdom had had to keep statistics. I mean, everyone knew where everyone lived. That was one of the ways that they had a police state.

So, sorry. And I'm being longwinded again.

The people that were involved in that were just locals, farmers. People said they recognized the people that were sort of attacking these houses and tearing down bits of concrete and ransacking tea shops that belonged to Muslim owners.

But then the following -- and then other people have said that some of the monks that have been involved in these attacks are bogus monks. In Burma, every man who is Buddhist at some point goes into a monastery and comes in and out in Buddhism, and they can -- well, the bogus monks would maybe put on robes, but they weren't using the language that monks are supposed to do.

It's not clear. But certainly, the clergy in Burma, or the members of the

monkhood, are about 400,000, about the size of the army. It could be elements of them.

It could be elements of people that were mobilized before.

MR. BUSH: Priscilla has (inaudible).

MS. CLAPP: One more point that I think has to be taken into consideration here is the march of technology. That is definitely giving a very big voice to a minority radical group on both sides of this issue.

The new phone system that's coming in. Everybody has got a phone now. They're in instant communication with each other. Facebook is a major means of communication.

I've never seen pictures of this monk with or without a microphone in front of his face. The monks stand up there in public with these big microphones, and they start chanting at 5:00 in the morning every day, chanting Invicta. It's really nasty in the neighborhoods and in the cities. Foreigners don't hear that, but the local people do, and it's annoying to them.

But you've got to take that into consideration. This didn't exist five years ago.

MR. BUSH: Let's do the gentleman on the aisle, and then I'll sort of work my way around.

QUESTION: Thank you.

I'm from Reporters without Borders.

So I have a question. About four years ago, the government released a lot of prisoners and journalists in a fairly friendly manner. So as the country is pushing toward democracy, what do you think about the prospect of press freedom and freedom of information in Burma, and do you have any concern about the journalists living and

working in the country?

MR. BUSH: Priscilla?

MS. CLAPP: There's been a great release of the press when they abolished the Press Scrutiny Board. They no longer censor the press, and there is a large private press. They're allowed to produce both monthlies, weeklies, and dailies, all of those. It's very lively.

There are too many newspapers. They're not going to survive, economically. Some of them are already folding.

There are no real rules of the road.

We have a free press, but it isn't free. There are lot of rules about how people can report, what they can report, whether they're legal or otherwise -- hate speech, libel, so forth.

Those things are not well-developed at all because they haven't had a free press. So the government is overreacting in many cases to some of the reporting, and they've been putting journalists in jail in ways that we think are unfair, but they are very concerned about the impact of this free press on the country's stability.

But the press is able to question the government. They're able to raise problems. That was never possible before, and it's a very healthy development.

MR. BUSH: Supplement?

MS. SCHRANK: Well, I'm just going to add to that that actually during the years of great censorship, when there was this Press Scrutiny Board that censored everything before it went to publication, or after it was printed and then it would have to be published, there was a very -- there was a sort of vanguard, I would say, of journalism that emerged in Burma, I think, through the 90s and into the early 2000s, where you had

despite extraordinary censorship rules -- you had weekly journals and monthly journals. And when they were trying to get news out about real political issues, they would have to do it in very elusive, metaphorical ways.

So it doesn't surprise me at all that now that there's been this unleashing of this unbelievable vibrancy. But there are, I would say -- just perhaps, I think that there are some -- a lot of journalists who do understand the sort of high ethical responsibilities of journalism and who abide by that, within obviously the sort of "let a hundred flowers bloom."

MR. BUSH: The woman in the black dress right there.

QUESTION: I'm sorry. Olivia Enos. I work at the Heritage Foundation in the Asian Studies Center.

My question is for Priscilla. You mentioned in your discussion that Burma's elections are a really big test for their democratization. In the event that the elections don't go well, what implications do you think this will have for U.S.-Burma elections? And instead of just thinking about what you think they will likely have, what implications should it have if the elections don't go well?

Thanks.

MS. CLAPP: I think it depends on what you mean by they "don't go well." There are many ways that the elections can sort of be half-baked.

And I think that what the U.S. should do is take the long view. As Ted was saying, these processes of democratization take a long time. They don't happen overnight, particularly in a country that's been shut off and living in a basically feudal condition for so long. It takes as long time to educate a population to democracy, to roll back the repressive military regime that's been running the country for so long. And we

should be expecting that there will be backward movement and forward movement in this process.

I think the U.S. has to develop a better sense of its long-term interest in the country and not just be reactive to every little transgression that happens on the part of the government because when we do that we shut ourselves off.

The transition that's going on right now is inevitably making Burma a major part of Southeast Asia. It's no longer a closed black hole like it was before, and it's going to become, as Lex described, a major transport route through and between South Asia and the Middle East and East Asia.

The U.S. needs to be engaged. They need to be engaged there, but we need to have some patience with the process and not just turn to sanctions and punishment every time something bad happens. I think we need to control our instincts in that regard and not let that dominate our policy.

MR. BUSH: Lex?

MR. RIEFFEL: There are many people in our country who believe that the only good outcome of the election is for Aung San Suu Kyi to become President of Myanmar. That seems unlikely. There are some people in the Congress who have said that if she is not going to be president we're going to have more sanctions against this country and so forth.

From where I sit, that would be not a smart way to react. There is no reason to believe now that she will emerge as president of the country. It's not -- I wouldn't rule it out, and yes, that would be a good outcome. But if someone else emerges as president -- you know.

We should be looking at things -- you know, what are they doing? Are

they putting journalists in jail? Are they mishandling the economy?

MS. CLAPP: And, Lex, we already know she can't be president this time around. It's been determined. They voted against it. And she recognizes that.

MR. RIEFFEL: Yeah, but there's also a constitutional tribunal that's been thrown out. Once it's been thrown out again, it could decide that she could be.

I don't know. Anything could happen in this country. I don't -- I understand that the constitution is not going to be amended and so forth, but I wouldn't rule out her becoming president.

MR. BUSH: Okay, that woman in black.

QUESTION: Hello. My name is Sophia. I'm here with the Washington Media Institute.

And I guess my question goes with these two. I was wondering. How does the situation with the Rohingya Muslims, as it develops and progresses, affect Burma's standing within the international community?

MR. BUSH: Okay. I'm going to take a few questions. The gentleman right up here.

QUESTION: Hi. Prashanth, Associate Editor with the *The Diplomat* magazine.

Going along with some of the questions that have been asked, I'm just wondering. Delphine talked a little bit about the NLD and the potential for victory and whether they're likely to win the election.

I'm just wondering if you would talk a little bit more about potential outcomes of the elections and how that might affect, or not affect, some of the reforms that we're talking about. So what might -- how might constitutional reform evolve if we're

looking for some indicators about human rights or future reforms in that regard?

I know we had -- a lot of these things, like economic reforms, will be dependent on structural factors. But I would love to get your insights on how that might, or might not, affect things.

Thanks.

MR. BUSH: Okay. And then the gentleman in the distinguished white hair over there.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. It took a long time to get it; believe me.

(Laughter)

QUESTION: My name is Paul Riley. I'm a neighbor of Brookings.

And I enjoyed the comments of Ted and Lex in regard to removing and reforming the military and how important it was in development of, and the struggle for, democracy.

What I did not hear was one word about what was important in our own development before the state -- freedom of the press. Is there such a thing as freedom of the press, and if not, do we really expect democracy in any country to really develop?

MR. BUSH: Sort of anybody who wants to answer any of the questions?

MS. CLAPP: Well, I can talk a little bit about the elections and what might happen.

There are two major single parties. One is the government party, the USDP, which stands for Union Solidarity and Development Party, and the NLD, the National League for Democracy that is headed by Aung San Suu Kyi.

In the 2010 elections, the NLD did not run, and the USDP won an

overwhelming majority. They're going to lose that in these elections. They will no longer be the largest party

I will predict that the NLD will be the single largest party. I'm not saying it will be an overwhelming majority because nobody knows.

I think people will vote according to the way they feel on the day of the elections. Many people will vote -- will see a vote for the NLD as a vote against the military. So I'm not sure that the public opinion polls help us much right now.

But there will be parts of the country where both the NLD and the USDP will not do well. It will go to the ethnic parties. So I think that the ethnic parties -- and there are lots of them, lots of them. There are some 70-odd parties already registered to run. The ethnic parties are going to gain seats.

I think the ethnic politicians, the ethnic areas, see the parliament now as a major instrument for them in trying to gain their autonomy and -- well, relative autonomy and rights.

So the parliament has become a seat of development of democratization in the country, and that's a good sign.

It's going to mean that the next government will have to do a lot of deal-making. They won't just be able to lay down the law in the way the USDP wants to.

And the USDP, of course, was meant to be an instrument of the military. It has not turned out to be such a fine instrument of the military because in many ways they've turned against the military.

You could see that in the vote against constitutional reform. When the military voted against all of those reforms last week and the week before, the majority of the parliament voted for them. But it wasn't 75 percent-plus. It can't be because the

military occupies 25 percent of the seats.

So even their own party voted for these reforms. That means that in the next government constitutional reform is going to be right there, front and center, and the military is going to be on the spot.

Now how much of that is personality we don't know. The real difficult battle of this election is going to come after the election because the parliament elects the president. The people don't elect the president; the parliament does. And so the composition of the parliament is going to have a major impact on the election of the president.

In 2011 or 2011, when all of these choices were made, they were made by the outgoing senior general, Than Shwe. He named all of the people that are in that, in the senior positions of this government now. That won't happen this time around.

It's an open book. We don't know how it's going to go.

MR. BUSH: Any other answers to any other questions?

I think the freedom of the press one was answered already.

MS. CLAPP: Yes, I did address that. I don't know why you said nobody has mentioned it. That was one of the last questions.

MR. BUSH: Actually, we have come to the end of our time in this room. I know there are a lot of other questions, and I'm sorry that we don't have more time for them.

You all asked very good questions, and I want to thank you for that.

I have some other thank-yous. I want to thank each of the panelists. I want to thank Lex for pulling all of this together. And, especially, I want to thank Delphine for writing "Rebel of Rangoon."

MS. SCHRANK: Thank you.

MR. BUSH: As Priscilla said, there's a story here that, had you not written it, would have been lost to us. Forever. So, thanks.

MS. SCHRANK: Thank you.

MR. BUSH: Thank you all for coming.

(Applause)

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