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MYANMAR'S CIVIL WAR: MILITARY, POLITICAL, AND CRIME DYNAMICS

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Felbab-Brown: Hello. Thank you very much for joining us. I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, the director of the Initiative on Nonstate Actors at the Brookings Institution. But I'm also a senior fellow, and I'm delighted that you are joining us today for a conversation with a stellar panel on the situation in Myanmar. What is happening with the civil war in the country? What are the prospects for getting out of the civil war?

Over two years ago, a military coup in Myanmar ended the democratic transition on which the country had been embodied for a decade. After decades of prior authoritarianism, the military has-- yet in consequence of elections, the military mounted a coup d'etat and ended the democratic process and since then has, however, encountered a surprisingly effective, if under-resourced, armed resistance in both rural and urban parts of the country, and not just in the ethnic minority areas that had long been a center of fighting and insurgency, in fact, for decades have been places of fighting an insurgency, but also in the Bamar areas, the areas where the country's ethnic majority lives. That conflict has been intensifying and become increasingly violent, including as the military, as the Myanmar military is responding with greater and greater brutality, including against civilians. Even so, the junta has not been able to extinguish the armed groups and the resistance groups. At the same time, neither the anti-junta resistance group nor the ethnic armed groups, the two side of armed actors in the country are anywhere close to defeating the junta either. And so some of the issues that we are going to be exploring is what are the prospects for sustaining conflict? Will there be any change if the junta holds any kind of elections, however credible or not? What are the historic tensions, rivalries, relationship between the national unity government led by the NLD as well as by as well as between the ethnic armed groups and the resistance groups? And of course, there are other issues that continue ongoing in the country that are getting less exposure, but nonetheless remain very significant, such as the fate of the Rohingya.

Moreover, overlaying the violent conflict and issues of political transitions and political relations and intersecting the sustainability of the armed struggle and sustainability of any kind of ceasefires are illegal economies. For decades, these illegal economies in heavily in [inaudible], wildlife trafficking, illegal logging, mining and increasingly now also issues of forced labor in casinos have fueled the conflict, but they also enabled and sometimes underpinned ceasefire arrangements. A wide variety of actors have participated in them: ethnic, the ethnic armed organizations, pro-government militias, various cronies of the junta and its military corporations, as well as Chinese criminal groups. So what is happening with these various illegal economies and what role they'll play in the conflict and any kind of transition out of the conflict today is another important theme, worth looking at it.

And finally, the conflict in Myanmar is not just a local civil war conflict. It intersects with the regional and geopolitical dimensions also. Russia has been providing arms to the junta and India, and India has supported the junta with both arms and diplomacy, while China's posture has remained more understated. Although condemning the coup and imposing sanctions on the Myanmar military, the West has not provided the armed resistance with military or financial assistance it seeks. And yet, just recently there was a strong op-ed by the former U.S. ambassador to Myanmar, Scott Marciel, calling for moving toward a much more forward leaning posture of the United States, including providing a much more significant assistance to the national unity government and the resistance groups. Yeah, that is fraught with very many issues. So yet another topic will be looking at, and for unpacking these various issues and giving us an intimate picture of what's happening on the ground.

I am absolutely delighted to have a stellar set of panelists. I really there are a few people who could be talking about Myanmar in a more nuanced and informed picture. I will introduce them as they are about to speak, let me start with Dr. Richard Horsey, to whom I will pose the first question. Doctor Horsey has been a close observer of Myanmar for the past 25 years. And any of you who are studying Myanmar, I am sure, have read his brilliant work, which has covered a wide range of issues, including the illegal economies political dimensions, but also a nuanced and granulated look at various states of conflict, including the current civil war. Since 2009, Dr. Horsey has been Myanmar advisor to the International Crisis Group. Prior to that, between 2002 and 2007, he was the Myanmar representative of the International Labor Organization, where one of the issues he focused on was forced labor by the previous regime. Something that has returned, though, these days is linked significantly also to Chinese criminal groups. Subsequent to his work

at ILO, Dr. Horsey was a senior adviser and spokesperson for the United Nations Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs following Cyclone Nargis.

Richard, let me start with you, please. Can you give us a brief overview of where we are with the civil war? What are the crucial stakes? And, perhaps provide an overview of the actors, I've been using terms such as resistance groups and ethnic armed organizations in my introduction, but could you please elaborate on this for our viewers today, as well as describe what kind of military tactics both the junta and the various armed groups are using? [Silence] Richard, I'm not sure that--

Horsey: Thank you very much. And, and thank you to Brookings Institute for inviting me to speak today. I'll try to give a short overview of where things are or where I feel things are and touch on as many of the points in your question as possible.

You know, two years on, more than two years on from the military coup, I don't think either the military regime or the resistance forces arrayed against it are where they wanted or expected to be at this point. For the military, I think there was an initial confidence that the resistance forces would quickly crumble in the face of, you know, military attacks. They felt that these were young kids who had taken up arms without any real knowledge or understanding of what it meant to fight the Myanmar military. And they thought that they would be able to deal with them quite quickly. I think they also felt that they would be able to remove community support for these groups again, by deploying the kind of brutal counterinsurgency tactics that have long been used in ethnic minority areas and deploying those in other areas of the country.

But neither of those things have happened. The resistance remains determined, it remains tenacious, and it seems to have very strong community support as well, despite the horrific atrocities that we've seen being committed by the military. So the resistance forces, you know, the hundreds of PDFs and local defense Forces and the national unity government itself, I think there was also an initial confidence that given the widespread anger across the country at the coup and then at the of the brutality of the military, that they would be successful in translating that anger, quite quickly, into revolutionary change. And that goal is still, it appears, some way off as well.

And so I think it's the third set of actors, the ethnic armed organizations, who are also in a very important position. These groups and other ethnic forces and militias as well, most of whom have experienced this kind of situation before or something like it. I think that they're groups that have tended to be less caught off guard by events and these different ethnic armed organizations, it's impossible to generalize. And it's also impossible in the time available to go through each and every organization and different analysis. But by and large, these groups have taken a range of positions depending on how they've judged the best path was to pursue or make progress on their own objectives and agendas. And for some, that has meant a much more assertive posture against the regime, against the Myanmar military. We've seen it clearly with the Chin National Front, the Karenni National Progressive Party, at least one faction of the new national union as well.

But for others, it's meant taking advantage of the fact that the military has been distracted by events in the center and by the political crisis and by the new conflict in the center, and use the space that that's provided to kind of spread their wings, to take over more territory, to ramp up their business activities, to take more control. Certainly that's been the case with the Arakan Army and the dying National Liberation Army as well. And I think overall, in much of the periphery of Myanmar, there is a strong sense that military authority is much less than it was, that Nay Pyi TawNay Pyi Taw and the regime has much less ability to control or influence events in the periphery than it once, than it once did. And for some groups, that's meant that they've seen an enormous opportunity to expand their economic activities, their territory, including illicit economic actors. And so whether it's the United Wa State Army, whether it's the Lahu militias around Tachileik, whether it's the Karen Border Guard Force down in Kayin state, that they've seen an opportunity from this, from this situation, and they've seized it very quickly. We've seen a ramp up of the illicit economy, whether it's a huge increase in opium production, 80% or more increased since the coup, continued massive production of methamphetamine and probably an increase there as well, but also a resurgence of casino activity, the kind of scam centers that Vanda spoke of in the introduction, as well as a range of other illicit activities, rare earth mining, other kinds of mining, logging and so on. And I think, you know, the prognosis

for the country at this point is not good, but the world, but it looks at Myanmar, I think is misdiagnosing the problem.

Myanmar's neighbors are not as alarmed by events as they should be. I think they're discounting many of the longer term and medium-term risks and focusing on short term situation. And I say this because, you know, I think initially after the coup, there was a great fear in the region and beyond that, that the coup would produce, you know, huge immediate impacts beyond Myanmar's borders, huge refugee flows and other situations, but haven't really happened. You know, the displacement in Myanmar is almost entirely internal. The vast majority of displacement is internal. There hasn't been a kind of major, major refugee, refugee crisis and there hasn't been a lot of fighting spilling across the borders either, which was the concern of some neighbors. And so I think they felt, well, okay, it's very bad for Myanmar, but it's not as bad as we feared for us. And that's allowed them to pursue a kind of self-serving strategy of engaging with Nay Pyi Taw, but not really taking difficult decisions. And I think that's a little bit the sense in the world at large as well, that in many other crises, crises dominating the global agenda over the last couple of years, whether it's the exit from COVID, you know, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the situation in Tigray and now the situation in Ukraine, and Myanmar has always been felt to be a worry, but not a first order worry, and the West has pushed down that agenda. And I think that's not only been very detrimental to Myanmar, it's also a strategic mistake, because I think when you step back and you look at what is happening in Myanmar, that the massive growth of the illicit economy, I mean, transnational criminal organizations are voting with their feet. I was two weeks ago in northern Laos in the Golden Triangle, special economic zone there, and looking around Tachileik as well. And, you know, the increase over the last year or two in illicit activity moving from northern Laos to Tachileik to other parts of Shan State and down to Shwe Kokko and elsewhere in foreign states. Enormous shift of the scam operators are moving a lot of their operations to Myanmar now. A lot of casino and money laundering activity is moving to Myanmar as well. And so these transnational groups who can choose, you know, the least problematic jurisdictions for them to do their illicit activities, they're choosing Myanmar right now, and it's not difficult to understand why.

So what does it mean for the region and the world to have state failure to have state fracture in Myanmar? You know, in a critical location of geopolitical contestation, what does it mean to have, you know, a massive, massive production of illicit narcotics that are being trafficked, at least across the Asia-Pacific? What does it mean to have a collapse of health infrastructure, children not being routinely immunized, tuberculosis treatment, HIV, malaria treatment collapsing? These things will have enormous knock-on effects. And I think, you know, those impacts have been discounted because they're a little bit farther off and harder to quantify. But I think what it means is that, you know, Myanmar will continue to create problems for the region and the world and that unless there are solutions found within Myanmar, for their crises, this is going to keep on rolling, and I think it really does require more attention from policymakers than it's had. I'll stop there.

Felbab-Brown: Thank you very much, Richard, for this really terrific overview. I look forward to hearing more from Yun Sun about some of the geopolitical dimensions and from Shunlei—from Thinzar Shunlei Yi very soon about some of the on the ground pictures that you, Richard, were talking about, issues like schools and health care collapsing. Just very quickly, Richard, you spoke about the horrific methods that the Myanmar military has been using, and this is a similar pattern. Can you just very briefly, for our viewers, explain what those methods are?

Horse: I mean, basically the Myanmar military is treating the resistance forces as insurgents and it's deploying its counterinsurgency strategy before cut strategy, which, you know, to any people in minority areas and to the Rohingya, you know, this is, this is very familiar from the past. It's the kind of extremely brutal approach which focuses on removing the support that insurgent groups need to operate, and that means destroying communities, destroying food supplies, removing the possibility of getting intelligence from local people. It often implies, you know, a lot of targeting of civilians, but also mass population displacement as well, so that insurgents don't have a civilian base that they can rely on for support, for intelligence, for recruits, and so on. And so we've been seeing this playing out, you know, this has been playing out for decades in the mountainous upland areas, and it hasn't been reported on much. It's been the subject of a great deal of concern, but I don't think many people in Myanmar, in the cities knew very much about what was happening. When the Rohingya face the same thing back in 2017, you know, many people in the cities

in Myanmar didn't really comprehend what was happening, I think, because they hadn't experienced this firsthand. But now, you know, these kind of extremely brutal tactics that focus on attacking civilian populations, these are being deployed in central parts of the country that not only have no experience of this, but also don't have the coping strategies that, you know, people in minority areas who have faced this have built up over decades and generations. And so it's having an enormous impact on communities, and, you know, it's no form of warfare. It's a, it's a form of civilian targeting.

Felbab-Brown: Well, a very distressing picture, and as you said, very typical of what's been happening in Myanmar for decades, and I look forward to Dr. Min Zaw Oo, also elaborating about what this means for sustainability resistance. But before that, you know, let me continue with the theme of what's happening on the ground, and I'm absolutely thrilled to have with us Ms. Thinzar Shunlei Yi, who is not only going to be very generous with her insight, but it's already very generous with waking up very early to be able to do the event, so enormous gratitude for that as well, Ms. Shunlei Yi is well known around the world for her tireless activism for peace and justice in Myanmar, particularly in the ongoing civil war. From 2012 to 2016, she co-organized and lead the nationwide various regional forums in Myanmar, as well as the National Youth Development Policy process. She was also the first female coordinator of the National Youth Congress and the two-term president of the Yangon Youth Network. Currently she leads, she's an advocacy lead at the Asian Youth Peace Network, and she also works with the Action Committee for Democracy Development. In 2016, Shunlei Yi received the U.S. State Department Award as emerging young leader, and in 2012, she also received the Women of the Future of Southeast Asia Award. And she's also one of the Obama Foundation's inaugural selected Obama leaders for Asia-Pacific. Last, I should mention that Ms. Shunlei Yi cofounded the Under 30 TV show in Mizzima TV, where she serves as the show's weekly host. Thinzar, you know, we started talking about the burden that communities in Myanmar are bearing, having to deal both with being deprived of having their voices counted in the political process of democracy, but also now facing a very difficult civil war and something that, of course, the ethnic minority communities really have dealt with since much of across much of the planet as well as 21st century. I would love to get your, from the very ground, perspective about what are the key concerns for people, the state of the resistance groups, of states of, the state of repression of human rights and just the local picture.

Shunlei Yi: Thank you, professor, and thank you so much for having me today. So as a civil society actor, as an activist for human rights and democracy, after the coup, we gather then our self and we form a general strike committee, so as a foreign affairs committee, members of the general strike committee, I also sit in the National Unity Consolidated Council, as in a different joint coordination committees and at the same time as ACDD coordinator, I've been working together with the farmers, worker, we are their food team, networks across the whole country, and I'm the only one outside the country as a, as the advocacy person so I can talk to you. So on behalf of all these coalition and ground strike members, I would like to share before I explain what is going on on the ground. We would like, we want, I want you to know that, why we are doing what we are doing, I think that's very important.

So today marks 772 days since the brutal coup attempt in our country. And today, in this early morning, I'm waking up to honor our people by continuing to revolt against military rule in Myanmar. Every day we must celebrate the undoubted spirit, relentless power and brave resilience of the Myanmar people marching toward democracy. So the coup attempt has wakened, awaken all of us who had almost come to accept the 2008 constitution, a constitution mainly drafted by the military and which guarantee impunity for its countless past crimes. I walked, I walked the pace, the path paved by the 2008 constitution when I began my journey as an activist. I got to know it on the ground, in the streets, in parliament, discussing it on TV, campaigning against it, using it to promote electoral rights and trying to widen its scope. I led advocacy for the first national policy deployment process in Myanmar in 2016, you know that I also organized the first public hearing in the parliament to remove the guest registration law, and I brought villagers, administrators and grassroot activists to parliament to push for administrative reform.

After, after ten years of advocacy in the 2020 election, I couldn't help but boycott it. I boycotted it, and the 2008 constitution at its base. I did not cast my vote and I wasn't alone. We knew too well that consequences of the paths we were walking under the military roadmaps. We had a strong sense that our country should not be designed like this. And the Myanmar nation, nation-building process has just started, only after the people of Myanmar launched a revolution, I would say, I was doubtful and suspicious with

many thoughts about people commitment or passion for change because we have seen ongoing genocide in the country and I thought nothing else could go wrong than this in this country or in the war. Now we have opportunity to reflect our past mistakes and fix them and then rebuild the nation, the country. So the goal of this revolution, this resistance, can no longer be denied [inaudible]. So now we must appreciate Myanmar's diversity and we must live in harmony as federal states. We don't need to be one, just one to fight them or to fight the junta. We can be ourselves and keep our unique identities. That's who we are and that's our strengths. The Myanmar situation is not getting better, as the military still resists, abandoning its coup plan, clinging to hope in the 2008 constitution, they, will only help them hang on and consolidate their power.

Last Saturday, the Myanmar army killed 30 civilians and three Buddhist monks at the monastery in Nahan village in Pinlaung Township in Shan State. Earlier that day at around 11 a.m., the army carried out airstrikes and shelling on the village where all the refugees were reported to be, shelling, burning down around 50 houses. The lives of the refugees are also at risk. The arrest cases are also growing in India border, in Manipal, in different state and also in the Thailand border. Well, now we are seeing more and more neighbors country cooperating with the new junta, including India. India has been legitimizing the junta since day one, by, by sending their ambassador, also sending the ends weapons, even in the last phase, they've been training Myanmar election commission in the Myanmar's, Myanmar junta's sham election.

So, in addition, to abandoning the 2008 constitution, we must cut into the military revenue streams. The military has brought countless weapons, but the people tax that and they are quite resourceful with the gas and the profit they gained during the ten year so-called democratic transition. Myanmar natural resources, also infrastructure are now seized by the military. After committing genocide in the last six years against the Rohingya population, now they are committing war crimes, crimes against humanity and massacre against every other ethnic population. And there is a call for the, to stop listening to disinformation from gas company and allowing them to fund the junta and its atrocity and its war on the Myanmar people by the Myanmar, Myanmar civil society and advocacy groups for the [inaudible] MOGE Myanma Oil and Gas Enterprise. And they been calling to an extention that divert to divert the oil revenue into escrow account and also BP anchorage and US government to work together with the Thai government to ensure compliance with the sanction. At the same time, in Myanmar inside the country every day, we have never allowed political defiance and different actions is also happening in the last year in different places in Myanmar, civil society like my organization, like ACDD, they all remain inside and they are organizing the ground to mobilize more activities and and to heal the souls of the communities and the people, and to educate the communities on resilience and resistance.

Ground strikes stay happening across country, and women are fighting in the frontline in the battle, also in the household against the dictatorship and patriarchy. When you can imagine when the houses are burned out, the military in the village, they burn down all the houses in the villages and then people are displaced after some time. And then they came back and to rebuild the houses and restore the spaces. So this is this has been happening. That's why we have we are seeing internal displacement in [inaudible], in the country, because they stay, they keep reminding people like me and you that people belong to the country, and we are everywhere and we are too many. And this generation is bringing change. So I will stop here and will share more in the second round.

Felbab-Brown: Oh, thank you so much for the very powerful comments and also enormous kudos and admiration for the very impressive work that you and your colleagues are doing under extremely difficult circumstances. You know, you spoke about living in a federal state. That's, of course, something that has been long, a difficult challenge, an issue in Myanmar over many decades. And I am really delighted now to continue delving more into this aspect of the conversation with Dr. Min Zaw Oo. Dr. Min Zaw Oo is currently the executive director of the Myanmar Institute for Peace and Security, where he leads policy research and analysis. The institute has produced over 100 security assessments and publications on a wide range of issues and I mentioned if you study Myanmar, you read Richards. If you study Myanmar, you have read Min. Dr. Min Zaw Oo also serves as a nonresident fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Security in Washington and a global fellow at the Peace Research Institute in Oslo. Before the coup, Min played a critical role in Myanmar's peace process. He served as the executive director of the Technical Secretariat Center of the Joint Ceasefire Monitoring Committee. He was advising the peace commissions established by the NLD led government and also providing technical support in the negotiations of the nationwide ceasefire

and the bilateral ceasefire that followed. Dr. Min Zaw Oo also served as the director of research and monitoring and evaluation for Democracy International, a project in Afghanistan, a country that too, is going through a great deal of suffering currently. And he was directing a research division of a subsidiary of the US based Ideas International. Min received his Ph.D. from George Mason University, but in recognition of his achievements, he was also awarded in the distinguished Alumni Exemplar in 2018.

Dr. Zaw Oo, can you please discuss more global what's happening in terms of the military struggle, the issues that Thinzar so eloquently and Richard in such pressing detail, were talking about, but also the challenge of the relations between the Bamar resistance group and the ethnic organizations. And currently we are in a period of perhaps unprecedented cooperation and unprecedented cooperation between the ethnic armed groups and the national unity government. But long there have been many differences, such as around the issue of federalism. What are the prospects for a continuation of the cooperations or for the resurrection of conflicts and disagreements, and not simply during the military struggle, but should the junta to be either defeated or should there be some sort of negotiated way out of the fighting?

Zaw Oo: Thank you, Vanda. Thank you for inviting me to talk about the current state of affair on the the different groups and factions in Myanmar. And after 2021 military coup, there is a new phenomenon which is the explosion of the new armed groups. Initially there were over 350 groups in March, but later they were consolidated into smaller number, but still in a few dozens. So it is very difficult to generalize how many types of new groups, but I tried my best, there were five types we can usually generalize. So Bamar armed groups then decided to become a part of the national unity government's People Defense Force, or the local defense force. So that's a one group. The second is the Burma armed groups. They want to stand by themselves. They don't want to be a part of the NUG chain of command. Well, one of the one cases Bo Nagar group in Palazakai. The third type is ethnic minority groups. It's not just Bamar forming new groups, but also many young ethnic group, young activists also form new ethnic armed groups as well. They are, one of the ones is the KNDF in Kayah. And for Shen State alone, there are over 20 groups. And now the fourth type is ethnic groups that join the existing EAOs, ethnic armed groups. The fifth type is the, the EAOs, the established EAOs help the new groups set up as a proxy forces. Like if you're going to see them [inaudible], the MNAA, the KNU, you're going to see that very different groups which is not under the NUG chain of command, but they set it up under the shadow of the EAOs. So these are the five types of new groups you can observe after the military coup.

So let me go to the relationship between the NUG and the EEAS at this point. It's a very complex and intricate relationship based on how the standing of the EAOs. One of the EAOs, most of the EAOS know that they want to maintain the ceasefire with the military junta, so the biggest group, [inaudible], NDAA, the SSPP and some of the NC signatories, they kept the distance from the NUG.

The second type is the groups that are not fighting actively with the military, but at the same time, they are supporting some of the resistance groups or selling arms for economic reasons. So this is another type of group, EAOs ; then some of the EAOs was actively collaborating with the NUG, those ones like the CNF, KIA, KNU. Even with these groups, the NUG relationships, intricate [inaudible] KIA doesn't want the NUG to set up battalions in KI control area. So a lot of these new fighters that under NUG association have to be part of the KI rather than setting up a standalone battalion. So even in KNU area, KNU rather have the PDF fighters attached to the military problems under the command of the apparent leaders rather than setting up a standalone battalions for the reason, most of the NUG battalions exist in the dynamic we know rather than ethnic minority areas. And there are also all the ills that are collaborating with the military junta. One of the EAOs, like [inaudible] National Army we are seeing more collaboration between them after the military coup. But there are also former ethnic armed groups, that signed a ceasefire and later they were transformed into militias and border forces and now they're collaborating with the military and they are also very significant in number, actually very significant number, a comparable to these some of the fighting groups. And they become the force multiplier of the for the military. And if we look at the landscape between these groups, among those even commandos fighting the regime and the NUG and those newly formed armed groups. There is no significant policy difference, so all the groups accepted that there's going to be a federalism in the future. But what is the predicament is the chronic factionalism rooted in country's political [inaudible] but then Myanmar is not the unique case, we have seen that the challenges of factionalism Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and any other weak state. But they are also other issues in issue that can impact on the

factionalism in Burma in coming years under the ethnic political parties, so many ethnic political parties, will contest in the upcoming election if this ever happened. We are seeing a lot of preparations and registrations for the many of the political parties.

Another issue is the friction between the NLD leadership inside the country and those in exile. That issue can play it out significantly, especially if the Daw Aung Suu Kyi who just released opinion and what is currently going on may not be in line. So that's another issue. Another issue that could impact on the nationalism, is influence of neighboring countries, especially China or some of the major EEAS as well. So these are the actors and issues to be considered and how they going to play out in the course of struggle against the military rule in Myanmar. So let me stop for now. Thank you.

Felbab-Brown: Excellent comments. Thank you. This is really terrific nuance and granularity that's allowing us to have both the broad picture and really get some of the crucial nuance for understanding how developments are taking place and what's likely ahead. You know, you mentioned the issue that federalism is now accepted, but of course, as you pointed out to countries like Iraq or Somalia, what the content of federalism mean, it's widely up for grabs. What is going to be the distribution of resources between the center? And if it is, how are local actors going to become police or other forces? All of those are very difficult issues in all circumstances. Should we get out of the current state of fighting? And you also started talking about the role of external actors in it, which is what I am looking forward to hearing Ms. Yun Sun very much to elaborate, and it's really a delight to introduce my terrific Brookings colleague, I will claim Yun as my Brookings colleague, she is a nonresident senior fellow at Brookings and was a visiting fellow at Brookings between 2011 and 2014. Her principal affiliation today is as the co-director of the East Asia Program and the director of the China Program at Stimson, but we like to claim Yun as ours. Prior to that from 2008 to 2011, Ms. Yun Sun was based in Beijing and work as the China analyst for the International Crisis Group and continually today she specializes in China's policies toward conflict countries, the developing world and more broadly. And if you are interested in Chinese foreign policy and geopolitical issues, I am sure you are reading and closely following Yun Sun's terrific work.

Yun, can you please elaborate on what we have started hearing from Richard and Min? What have been the reactions posture of China, Russia, India, The United States? India has adopted its typical ultra-real politics, as I like to call it, but China's reaction was for a while a more nuanced and hedged. And yet recently, we see the Chinese state openly resuming preliminary work on Myanmar, on the railway from China to the Rakhine state, for example, and that that railway is a key component of the Myanmar economic corridor. You're starting to see more Chinese activity. Does that mean that China has decided that it's time to embrace the junta and the fighting, or is it still trying to maintain a more nuanced position? Anyway, looking forward to your thoughts on that as well as the other actors. Over to you.

Sun: Sure, thank you Vanda, thank you for the invitation. It's a terrific opportunity to to look at what has happened to Myanmar since the coup and what the regional dynamics in related to the situation in Myanmar. For all these actors that you have mentioned, I would divide them into basically three camps. So now one side of the spectrum, we do have the United States and Europe. Basically, we would characterize them as the West or ardently opposing the military coup, and also the ICC and the West have been calling for the restoration of political order and the political system before the before the coup, and especially since the military started to adopted the scorched earth policy towards PDAF and towards CDM as the U.S., a main part of the U.S. policy has focused on the calling was of pressuring on the ICC to stop human rights abuse and stop human rights violations. And I think that political issue has become an indispensable precondition for any improvement of relations between U.S. and Myanmar, which is a very long shot to begin with. But we are seeing a lot of actions from the U.S. in terms of pressuring with all the ever-growing list of the of the sanctions against Myanmar, against the other members of ICC, their family members and their business associates. And the list is also becoming more comprehensive. And as I would say, the sanctions has become a primary element of U.S. policy towards Myanmar at the current stage.

U.S. has not extended the recognition of NUG, but the U.S. has expressed as a sanction and the support of the people, sanctions on the military and support of the people of Burma is for their struggle for the democracy, freedom, human rights, and instead, I would say that US does make a distinction between NUG and the democratic moment in general and has U.S. has expressed is this indisputable support for the

democratic movement and democratic voices in Myanmar. But in terms of the recognition of NUG, I don't see that coming just yet. We have seen in recent months growing interaction between U.S. and the NUG, NUG now has a representative office here in Washington. The NUG leaders also most recently has come to visit the Washington and met with a list of American senior officials. So with all that being said, official recognition of NUG is not there yet. Since the passage of the NDAA, which includes the Burma Act last year, I think the most striking or the attractive issue for the U.S. policy towards Myanmar is focus on the part of the legislation that authorizes nonlethal support for the for the movement against, as you mentioned, the junta. There are debate as well who are eligible for the support and what the support actually constitutes and who will get what. I think that question is being is being deliberated very, very intensely now. My understanding is there have been a lot of requests sent to Washington and a lot of questions being asked as for what is a best deliberation or the best formulation to implement this this legislation, this authorization. But I don't think that a clear answer has been has been produced now.

On the other end of the spectrum, I would say it is Russia, that if we look at Russia's relationship with the Burmese military, since the military coup is it really has grown exponentially both in terms of the quantity and also the quality. We're seeing a growing number also, for example, senior level visits between Myanmar and and Russia. We're seeing the Russian arms sales to Myanmar reaching unprecedented level compared to before. In fact, that there is this perception that Russia has overtaken China to become the largest military supporter of the in terms of the military sales and military aid has become the largest supporter of the Burmese military. And I think another issue that really gets all the nerves of many is issue of nuclear cooperation between Russia and Myanmar. We know that historically there has been a lot of skepticism and suspicion about the Burmese military, the last a military government trying to develop their own nuclear weapons program. Now, Rosatom, the Russian national the Russian national nuclear company, has signed an inter-governmental agreement with Burma about the peaceful use of nuclear technology, and that raises a lot of question. People wonder what is the purpose of Russia's engagement with Myanmar at this particular time? There are different theories that Russia is trying to create leverage, Russia is trying to support a fellow authoritarian regimes. But I think it is quite evident that they Russia is is the most ardent supporter of the Burmese military at this moment.

Well, the rest of the countries in the region, China, India and ASEAN, while ASEAN, if we can generalize. I would say that for all these countries, there is a large element of ambiguity in their attitude towards a military. We know that we cannot speak about ASEAN as one entity or one voice but within ASEAN, I think the countries that have not condemned the military, military coup, and the countries that have been ambiguous towards the towards the ICC have called, have raised a lot of eyebrows and attention. Especially I would say today I think the energy of Thailand is becoming more and more controversial. We know that Thailand is dependent on Myanmar in terms of energy, so Thailand will oppose sanctions against, for example, MOGE, the Myanmar national energy company, but since the coup, I think it is also it also needs to be recognized that that along the Thai-Myanmar border, the Thai authority has allowed for a lot of the oppositions and people in exile to live there and to continue to operate their home there. But so I would say that the Thai attitude is becoming quite controversial within ASEAN there are also different opinions, we know that Indonesia has been particularly critical of Myanmar and this year Indonesia is the chair of ASEAN, but ASEAN coming to a collective, unanimous, and actionable plan for ASEAN that seems most would agree that would be an overestimate of what ASEAN can deliver.

Last but not least, a little bit about China. China has not condemned the military government towards a military coup, at least not in public. But there is a clear, at least content and clear dissatisfaction towards the internal chaos amid instability in Myanmar. And I would say that under these circumstances, Myanmar is becoming a source of instability for China, because, remember, China just had three years of COVID be lock-down, right, that basically built a wall and along the border to prevent Burmese nationals from coming in. But now China has reopened, which means the porous border is going to the same situation that we had in the past is going to resume. And under the current unstable situation in Myanmar, it is really a big question as well how much the Chinese desire the investment plan can transpire safely, especially for things like the railway that they're trying to build if they go through, for example, the state-controlled area, you have to ask that, well, what is what is the safety or security risk related to those?

China has not accepted NUG but there are engagement on a technical level. And what I mean by technical is that war areas where China have investment and assets of the Chinese government or depending on which level we're talking about, can maintain the engagement, or interaction with NUG and PDF with those, at those locales in order to ensure the safety of all Chinese assets. The lockdown in China for the past few years also has had a major impact over China's diplomacy on the issue of Myanmar because there was no travel, so it was extremely difficult for Chinese diplomats and China's special envoy to visit Myanmar and to conduct their shuttle diplomacy in the region, but we know that since China has reopened late last year, China has vowed to enhance its diplomatic engagement and diplomatic activities this year. In fact, if you look at the government budget that just came out last week from Beijing, the budget for diplomatic expenditure increased by 12% this year. And I think that really suggests the Chinese are gearing up towards more diplomatic engagement and activities, and that includes the issue of Myanmar. The newly appointed Chinese envoy for Myanmar since his appointment in late last year, he has already visited Myanmar twice at a visit the border region twice, which is a I would say, a frequency that is unprecedented since China created the position of the special envoy for Asian affairs ten years ago. And also since last Friday, the world has been shocked by this Beijing brokered a peace deal between Saudi Arabia and Iran. I think that also alludes to the direction that China wants to push. And there's a framework of global security initiative that China wants to be a leader in terms of peacemaking and in terms of conflict resolution, so I think there is definitely going to be more actions on Myanmar from China this year.

Last but not least, I just want to echo something that Richard said, which is eventually what happens in Myanmar depends on the internal developments, depends on the internal dynamics. I will say a lot of these regional players, China included, they are watching very closely the power struggle, words, the battlefield, the development between the NUG, between the resistance and the and the SAC. And the result of that, the military struggle will vary to a large extent determine where China will stand and I would say that that it will also decide where India will stand, or where the regional countries will stand. So eventually the core of the solution to the Myanmar problem still comes from within. We cannot rely or expect that the regional countries to determine the future of the country for Myanmar or expect that their actions to somehow dramatically or deterministically change the situation within the country, so eventually this is domestic politics-driven regional diplomacy, or regional alignment; it's not the other way around. Thank you.

Felbab-Brown: It's actually a perfect transition, Ms. Sun, to what I want to be a lightning round going off for all of our speakers, namely, what is the way out of the conflict? Three years, five years, two decades from now? Are we looking at a military victory by one side? Are we looking at a very protracted conflict without a visible way out? Can there be some negotiated transition? All of you have outlined the very complex international picture behind the divided international picture, a very complex domestic picture, and a great deal of suffering. And just a side note on China, of course, China knows Myanmar very intimately and has been long, deeply involved in managing conflict, brokering conflict management in Myanmar in a way that China does not have a toll in the Middle East, and where in the Middle East it was able to gain a big diplomatic PR win in the Saudi, Iran, the Thailand, the content of that deal is actually very weak, but it might be quite different in Myanmar. Anyway, Richard, let me go in the order that I started to, you know, very quick, lightning round your thoughts on what is the way out, but also key policy recommendations. And after this lightning round, I will go to questions from the audience that we are receiving both live and already on the air in writing, Richard.

Horseley: Thanks, Vanda. In terms of the way out, I mean, I think a military defeat by one side or the other is extremely unlikely and I think the resistance forces also recognize that they're not fighting to take over Nay Pyi Taw and defeat the Myanmar military on the battlefield, on the battlefield. They're creating space where they hope that something else can happen, where the military will split or the military will be catastrophically weakened by other events and economic crisis, something else. The problem is that that's a hope, it's not a plan, right? I think the military on its side remains determined to hang on, the costs for the military of failure are extremely high, personally, for the people who led this coup and for the military as an institution. So the military is not going to back down, but neither are the resistance forces, so I think we're in a in a kind of crisis mode until something happens to change that, and what that might be, I think, is unclear.

But this isn't a kind of frozen conflict. This is a conflict that has enormous daily implications on people across the country. And it's a conflict in which other actors, militias, transnational criminal organizations and some states, to be very frank, are taking advantage of the chaos to pursue their own agendas, so this is not a frozen conflict. It's not something that can be safely ignored. It's not that the outside world can determine events on the ground, as Sun very, very eloquently said, but there are policy levers that can be pulled to mitigate some of the worst impacts on ordinary people and on some of the transnational implications as well, and I think that's where we should be looking, not to solve the crisis, I think that's that there are no easy solutions. And my fear is that faced with a situation which doesn't have an obvious solution and faced with a situation where outside influence is frankly quite limited, the policymakers tend to turn away, put it at the bottom of the pile and go on to other issues where they may feel that their action is going to have more and more impact. And that's very dangerous. It leads to donor fatigue in terms of humanitarian support for people in Myanmar, for the Rohingya in Bangladesh, it means that there isn't a kind of active watching of the diplomatic environment to seize on opportunities that people get stuck in grooves, you know, slices, salami slices of more sanctions from the West, continued subpar performance from from the region in thinking through this, and we can't allow ourselves to be stuck in those grooves. I think, you know, there needs to be more of more innovative thinking and at least at a minimum, help to support the population of the country.

Felbab-Brown: Well, thank you, Richard, and the issue of complexity and protracted conflict is even more magnified by a very different U.S. policy agenda, which no longer wants to be doing state-building stabilization and instead is really directed toward the Asia-Pacific in competition with China and Ukraine. But with this geostrategic context, things are what is the view of you, your fellow activists, your fellow resistance activists on how do we get out of the situation?

Shunlei Yi: Thank you, Vanda, and for all your all of your comments in the first one as well. So as a young generation and as a woman, I've been since the revolution started, now is now evolving into more full-blown revolution. It was not just anti-coup resistance. It was not just protest somewhere. There is now turning into revolution. When we talk about revolution, that means we are changing the system, political system. When we talk about revolution, what we name it as a revolution is not just resistance, is also political resistance, is also ideological resistance, ideological revolution. So we are looking into change in people mindset out of this struggle. And this is already happening. And that's what we think today to two years onwards. We have gained a lot on the way in the process compared to what we have gained in the past ten years in terms of political advancement, not intentional economic benefits. That's what I think, I'm stay hopeful.

What we have right now, for example, Federal Democracy Charter is no more 2000 constitution; Federal Democracy Charter or NUCC or and it was a first-ever dialogue ever happened between different ethnic groups, between different political stakeholders without military schedule, without military participation is the first ever political dialogue ever happen. So people say dialogue's not happening in the country. No, that's wrong. We have meetings almost every day between different ethnic groups, between different actors we are talking to, right. Me as a young, you know, nonviolent civil society, and I can talk directly to the ethnic and revolutionary leader. I can talk directly to the people on the ground of people. This is, this has never happened in the country. So I think we should keep up doing this, get used to it and be okay with different views and different visions. We have different takes. It has been seven decades-long struggle and there is mistrust between different actors and all because the military rule was abstained in the past three decades, seven decades. But now, for the first time in the country, that kind of political opportunity happened, we can say it's window period where we are shaping our own nation. So I think this is the way forward, is already there. The political role met of the Myanmar resistance is it has 12 step and it's already on six step is already on the way in the middle way. So we just have to keep going forward. And this revolution is not just about people and like we are also including the voices of the defenders, including the voices of the soldiers, not just outside, but also inside. The revolutions now listen to the people inside the military institution as well, we are listening to the wife, we are listening to the young generation. What do they want? Because the future we are building right now is for everyone, including all these soldiers and their generations, too. Thank you.

Felbab-Brown: Thank you very much. Min, over to you. What's the way out? How do we sustain the spirit of participation and accountability that people like Min said are so fearlessly promoting?

Zaw Oo: Yeah, the the revolution of the 2021 have waken up young generations throughout the country and also the revolution. But at the same time, the country has created to focus on violence when it come to the resistance, the nature of resistance, and also the conflict dynamics. For example, if you go and look at places like Yangon, Mandalay and these area where the there were like a number of nightclubs open in Yangon tumbled after the military coup. And also they are packed. So at the same time, the places like it's a kind of people losing their houses. Now, their house were burn down, people are running, people cannot go to schools. So this conflict would definitely create a very dynamic and very contrasting socio-economic situation, depending on where people live in the country. In terms of armed conflict, which is about to reach its equilibrium, especially the military is now launching a new offensive, and after that dry season, we may be able to see a new equilibrium. For the anti-junta resistant forces to change the equilibrium in their favor. They need to address issues of weapons supply, which is still in major need and in the coordination of unity with EAOs. That is still a lot of work to be done and the change of command, I also addressed this issue in my presentation and also support for the neighboring country. So these four issues are very critical for them to change equilibrium. Without this, it will be very difficult to turn the tide against the military and also for the elections. The military is sending a very mixed signals about the elections. Some rumors have they may extend it, some say what they got. We are also seeing some evidence of the elections but election that will not change the current political crisis and will not resolve the political crisis. But what the election could happen is election could introduce a new political space and bring you actors into the playing field, such as ethnic political parties and some of the pro-democracy groups inside the country to the new actors coming into the new playing field. But other than that, election will not able to add a result to the current crisis, and the conflict will remain frozen and could be protracted for another, I would say, about ten years. Thank you.

Felbab-Brown: I mean, certainly a protracted conflict, hot, protracted conflict, I think, is what the picture is right now, a very difficult picture for people who have to live with the complex picture for the international environment, but for the international community, rather, in the spirit of being able to take as many questions from the audience in the remaining 22 minutes that we have, let me direct big questions and direct them to a particular panelist. Please let me know if there are some strong points that you particularly want to come on. But let me start with you, Dr. Zaw Oo, and also you, Dr. Horsey. One of the questions we received is what keeps the Myanmar military cohesive despite the losses and being stretched thin? The viewer asks, We have not seen many mass desertions; we have seen some but we don't see mass desertions despite a wide base of popular support for the democracy movement. Your thoughts, please. Maybe Min I'll start with you and then I go to Richard.

Zaw Oo: Now, I will say that this strongly linked to how Myanmar military is formed at the unit level. For a lot of battalions in the Myanmar military, a lot of these soldiers, except officers, rarely rotate. So a lot of these soldiers, they are in particular unit for many long years. So that creates some extent of brotherhood. So they may be, they may not like the leaders, they may not like the senior generals, they may not like the system, but when it come to the unit cohesion, the military, the military is still a one-piece fighting force because of the small unit cohesion. So that was the one of my observations. That's the reason that's why we don't see a unit level defection up to this point.

Horsey: I think the other factor is that the senior command of the military doesn't have a lot of concern for the circumstances in which its troops are fighting. You know, there are some militaries where a large body count, where very difficult supplies would create enormous pressure, both within the military as an institution and within the wider support base, the wider the wider social circles. That's not the case with the Myanmar military. I think the high levels of injuries and deaths are the very difficult logistical problems that the military is facing on the ground level. These don't impinge on the high command. They don't feel that this is their problem, this is for, you know, junior and mid-level commanders to deal with. And so however many soldiers get killed, I don't think that really, really impacts the, you know, in Nay Pyi Taw, in the war office, they're feeling just as the Russian military has shown, it's willing to throw thousands of soldiers into Ukraine and absorb huge losses without that, without causing a change of heart at the top. I think the Myanmar military is also willing not only now, but throughout history, to to put its soldiers in harm's way, to accept the high level of attrition of casualties and still just continue on.

Felbab-Brown: A brutal picture. Thinzar, let me direct this question to you, please. One of our viewers is asking, how can support be best directed to civil society organizations in Myanmar? And how can the pitfalls for international actors be managed to avoid providing material assistance to resistance groups, which could put external actors in sensitive issues related to money laundering or providing a material support? The Myanmar government has been calling for designating many of the armed groups terrorist groups, that's obviously absurd and the West hasn't done that. Nonetheless, there are significant sensitivities about material support issues and financial transfer issues. Your thoughts, please, on how best what are the best mechanisms to support civil society groups in Myanmar?

Shunlei Yi: Thank you for those questions, very important. And that's also many civil society inside the country would also like you to know that they are still working on the ground, but maybe different identities. They are now low profile. They can, now they are changing their names. They are, they are acting on the ground. But I assure you that there's there are so many civil society still remain on the ground and they are operating in their own ways and Myanmar is known as they are different way of working things on the ground. For sure, the human rights organizations and resistance organization, resistance leaders of civil society organization can't remain inside country. For example, media and leading activist groups. They can't remain inside the country because they were so bold in the past ten years, their names already there. But there's so many different charity groups. Are blood donation difference, single mom house, all these service providers remain inside. And now their political, I would say. understanding is now getting higher; that means they are making sure the delivery of aid go directly to the people. And now we are seeing that there are different reports when the military weaponized the aid and also military confiscate that aid when the aids are sent through them. So what we've been advising is they are many civil society inside country.

So talk to the civil society directly. How they you can deliver effectively and also talk to the civil society along the borders. There's so many border groups since long time ago. They have a tremendous experiences and on ground memories of how they could work. And now they are now operating in a landscape, and so cross-border aids are really important and still, so we need to advocate Thai government, India government to allow these cross-border humanitarian aid to go directly to the impacted communities. And at the same time, there's so many concern from the different diplomatic community how we can avoid from the weaponizes of these aid from both sides and stuff. So I would say in the resistance group or in the revolution, these cross-border civil society, they work with principles they work with, they may be Karen group, they may be Kachin group, but they are different civil society like Karen women organization, Karen human rights groups where they make sure that deliveries or aids are going directly to the impact of civil society.

You know, we can't just generalize: the Karen people are just all about like the resistance or the and pillar know they are many humanitarian and civil society even in the one ethnic groups they work differently. So I think that's how now people are being delivering aids informally for the right now. But if the government change the policy, then it's easier, especially pressuring the neighboring countries, Thailand and India, so it will get easier.

Felbab-Brown: Thank you. Thank you very much, Thinzar, for this thoughtful and detailed response. Yun - let me direct this question to Yun. One of our viewers is asking what dangers do armed resistance groups pose to neighboring countries or will they pose if the national unity government and its allies win the civil war? Now, we have heard, there are no prospects for winning the civil war right now. And we also heard Richard's opening comment that neighboring countries were at first afraid of both refugee flows across the borders and the conflict spilling across the borders. That hasn't happened up till now. But are there some blowback risks of should our neighboring countries be concerned about either the armed resistance groups and ethnic armed organizations or frankly, about the continuation of the conflict?

Sun: That's a great question, Vanda, I really find this question to be deserving more exploration and the more you mastication because I think people tend to generalize, right, and just like Thinzar just said, while you cannot just generalize, because every group is different and every border is different, I think the Indian culture, for example, about the Indian northeast, a potential riot and their collaboration with their relationship with the Burmese, I think, armed groups is quite different, honestly, from the Thai concern about instability and about the inflow and the outflow of basically the transporter crimes and transborder mobility

issue. And I think across the board, given the question about the financial revenue of these organizations and to what extent that that they do rely or on where at least a draw some of their revenue from illicit activities, aid also is a main concern for all the neighboring countries because this is the areas that, Vanda, you specialize on, in terms of the illicit illegal activities to fund the military campaigns and military operations.

So no matter what we say, there is going to be that spillover risk of internal instability in Myanmar. There have not been there have not been this major outflow of refugees from Myanmar to neighboring countries just while I was there just yet. But I don't think that is a prominent conclusion moving from now on, especially, I think, for the Chinese when they look at their border, the refugee inflow after the 2009 [inaudible] instance, that was 37,000 people. And then the after the 2015, again, the [inaudible] conflict, that's another tens of thousands of refugees into China. So depending on where the armed conflict is going to intensify, I wouldn't say that the potential for refugee outflow is is completely off the table. And last but not least, I think this is another area that makes the makes the Chinese position really interesting, which is while they do have concerns about ethnic armed groups on their border, working with what they believe working with Americans or working with was with Westerners like Europeans even included. So there is the perception that, for example, Kuching is willing to introduce foreign Western influence into this region on China's border. And it is a pretty, I would say, a pretty good critical concern coming to China's policy towards Myanmar, because eventually there is a very strong element of prevention of Western influence to come to this area and come to China, especially come to China's border with the potential to affect China's border stability. So that's another, I would say, is that is a distinct concern for China and it does affect China's attitude towards these groups. So I will stop there. Thank you.

Felbab-Brown: Let me actually continue, Yun Sun, on the theme of China, and welcome everyone else to chime in on that. You know, China's policy has certainly been very preoccupied with keeping the West out. I remember ten years ago a Chinese diplomat telling me as the country was opening, quote, that the United States stole China, sorry, stole Myanmar from China. Of course, Myanmar is no one's to steal; it's its own country and that characterization was fraught for many problems. At the same time, even the previous government, the NLD government, had a very strong relationship with China. Aung San Suu Kyi, as first visit as the state councilor, was to China. So two questions for everyone, starting with you, Yun. What is the relationship right now between the national unity government and Beijing like? What can we say about that? And second, you know, we have been talking about the protracted conflict, but in this case, unlike in Ukraine, it is not in China's interest to have a protracted conflict going on. In Ukraine, China may be quite happy to keep Russia just alive, not to be defeated, to detract the West's attention from solely the Indo-Pacific. But in Myanmar, vital economic resources are at stake, major projects, that is the issue. Ethnic groups, refugees, China would be much better off if the conflict came to an end. How does China navigate that? Yun perhaps starting with you then I can go to Min, Thinzar and Richard.

Sun: Sure, thank you. I think there are two questions. One, how does China potentially will do anything or anything to stop this conflict because it is in China's interest? And I think the Chinese well, here's the thing. Just like the Ukraine conflict, I think the Chinese want to end. But if you ask China to use this critical influence over Russia to bring the war to an end, I don't think China is willing to disperse resources with that influence meaning that while if there is peace and it doesn't cost on anything, great, but it is going to cause China as a significant relationship that it has with Russia, well is in China's top security concerns to remain so, geopolitics, which is the United States and Russia is using as a as a partner in that campaign.

But so coming back to Myanmar, we have seen this this this instability protract in Myanmar for, I would say, decades. And sometimes, unfortunately, this facilitates a policy inertia in China, like, oh, Myanmar is in chaos with the news. So I think because the fact that China has been living with a Myanmar in a civil war for seven plus decades, there is a sense of normalcy, unfortunately. But, of course, many would say that, oh, what is happening now is entirely different, is entirely different problem from before, because now the young people, the young Generation Z, the public opinion is completely has completely changed from before. But I don't think that has created a critical impact on China's policy just yet, meaning that while by the end of the day, the Chinese was this is not our territory, and as long as we can protect our border, it's not a bottom-line issue for China that China has to address. Does it want it to be addressed? Sure. But if asked if China has to use this critical policy leverage and the influence to make it happen, I just don't think that fits the pattern of China's policy.

Second question is China's relationship with NUG. I think there has been the hope from the resistance that if China could adopt a more receptive and open and welcoming attitude towards the resistance, then that's going to sway the dynamics on the battlefield or the political dynamics in the country. I think that goes back to my comment earlier that eventually China's attitude is dependent on the internal development, it's not the other way around. I don't think the Chinese will be willing to use this influence to sway the politics in one way or the other because of for China, I talked about this before, I think the Chinese also see the NUG's legitimacy as a question. That we know the NUG's legitimacy came from the CRPH but the Chinese would say that the CRPH was created by this handful of legislators, MPs elected in the 2020 election. Well, if you look at the Hluttaw, there are more than six hundred MP, so what is representative this of the CRPH represents a Hluttaw to begin with. So that's a different question. But I think for China, if NUG is going to prevail, I think the Chinese will be willing and happy to work with NUG just like they were happy and willing to work with NLD. This is not about an attachment which was a military junta at all, is more about a practical realistic acceptance of the political reality in the country. And in the Chinese view, I'm afraid to say this, the military is still regarded as the dominating force in the country, and this stalemate, it does not seem to have a rapid ending in sight. Thank you.

Felbab-Brown: Min, Thinzar, and Richard, you are four, five minutes away from having to answer. Also, please use this last opportunity in 2 minutes to make any other points beyond the China issues that I raised. Min, over to you.

Zaw Oo: Yeah, I would like to talk about beyond China because it is critical that a civil society need to survive inside the country. Despite the revolution, despite other people joining the revolution, the civil society is still there. These civil society need to survive because we cannot wait until everything to resort to re-enact a civil society. So this is something the international community should pay attention, that there are still nonviolent activists inside the country. There are still pro-democracy political parties still there, pro-democracy ethical party still there. They are also waiting for the opportunities to add, hence the interest on this federalism and democratic issues. So this is an issue. We also should pay attention and support these groups inside the country.

Felbab-Brown: Oh, thank you. Terrific. Thinzar, please, your concluding thoughts.

Shunlei Yi: Thank you. So when we talk about Myanmar's issue, Myanmar's problems, you know, impacting across our neighbor, also in the region, we must think of the root cause of the problems. For example, we had a 2000 constitution. We thought it was a political transition to a better Myanmar, a peaceful Myanmar. But we shouldn't forget that we had a continuous civil war. I was protesting, even protesting against the civil war. Within that ten-year long period, we even had a genocide against Rohingya out of this whole scenario. So we must reflect now, like what was this? What is the real political realities in the country? What should be this in the very beginning? So now the answer is federal democracy that people being asking, people being demanding in the last year right now. So at the same time, there is a big question is about who is the dominant factor in the country, who is influencing the whole Myanmar political sector? I would say military, of course, they control many different infrastructure, but that does not mean that they are in power. I mean, they may be in power because the power, people may interpret the power come from the [inaudible]. But in the long term, the generation same seeing things the power come from people, the power comes from the resistance, power come from the revolution. So we should think of next 20 years what the current generations are thinking of right now and how it will shape the next 20 years. And I think that will give you more insight on the way you think of Myanmar, thank you.

Felbab-Brown: Thank you very much. Very powerful words. Richard, your concluding thoughts please.

Horseley: Thanks. I want to come back to something that Min Zaw Oo said and one of his four criteria for resistance success, which was support from neighbors or a neighbor. And I think that has to be thought about as well politically by the national unity government. I mean, it's great that they've formally opened an office in Washington, but as you pointed out, Vanda, it's not that we're not living in a world we're not living in an era where the U.S. is willing or capable to determine outcomes in countries far away, particularly

countries neighboring China. And I think the last thing we want is Myanmar to be pulled in to the geopolitical rivalry between the U.S. and China. It hasn't been pulled into that, particularly so far. That's a worst-case scenario for Myanmar. So really, the NUG needs to be focusing its efforts on convincing countries in the region that it is someone they can deal with and improving that diplomacy. It's been tried. It's been trying really hard. That's a that's a very hard nut to crack. But, you know, focusing efforts on the West can make the regional peace harder to solve, I think, because when China is sitting on the fence in this situation, it's not because it's unsure who it wants to back or who's going to win. I think it sees the NUG primarily as a Western leaning military alliance supporting organization and the broader resistance in that in that light. And that's not a very comfortable entity for China to feel that it wants to engage with or that it feels that it wants to take control of Myanmar. When it looks at the Myanmar military, it also sees a group of generals who have been always intensely suspicious of China and who've really messed up what China felt was the golden period under the NLD and Aung San Suu Kyi. And so that's why they're sitting on the fence. But they can't sit on the fence forever. I think the extension of the state of emergency, the postponement of the elections, has meant that China can't afford to wait until there's a new political dispensation, post elections and engage with a post regime military structure. I think it feels it has to start thinking now about which way it goes. And so now is the moment where I think the NUG has to be working the hardest to convince China and other neighbors that, you know, we can do business. We're not a puppet of the West. We're not we're not an organization that's been captured by the West. And that's the real the real priority, I think, right now.

Felbab-Brown: Thank you very much, Dr. Horsey, Dr. Zaw Oo, Miss Shunlei Yi, and Miss Yun, Miss Sun, for your very informed, very nuanced, very detailed comments and enormous thanks for spending the time with us today. Very particular thanks again for Thinzar to joining us very early, but also for all of your commitment to Myanmar and all of your efforts to ease the suffering the people there are experiencing. Enormous thanks to all of our viewers. The event will stay recorded on the Brookings website. Feel free to continue going back to the video and thank you very much for joining the Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors program. Our next event will be on the Wagner Group in Ukraine and Africa and beyond. And I hope that some of you can join. We will certainly continue being focused and engaged on Myanmar and many of the issues that we have raised.

Zaw Oo: Thank you.