

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8002>



Myanmar

Two years after the military putsch, Myanmar's forgotten war

- Features -

Publication date: Thursday 30 March 2023

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

On 1 February 2021, the Burmese army (Tatmadaw) broke off its governmental cohabitation with the National League for Democracy (NLD), incarcerating its leaders, and then plunged the entire country into an atrocious asymmetric war. Two years later, it has still not succeeded in imposing its control over a large part of the territory. Despite their inferiority in arms, the various components of the resistance have defeated it, with the aim of putting an end to a military regime that has made clear its refusal of any democratic transition.

By way of introduction, let us quote the statement issued on 1er February 2023 by the Women's Peace Network. It is a powerful expression of what we all feel as we follow the day-to-day struggle of the people of Burma:

"Two years since the Burmese military's attempted coup, over five years since its 2017 attacks of genocide, and after its decades of atrocities against our communities, we, Women's Peace Network, are conflicted with speechless tragedy and rage. The military remains free to brutalize the entire country even after murdering nearly 3,000 civilians, arbitrarily arresting and detaining over 17,000, and torturing hundreds of thousands more in only two years. Its forces are escalating its airstrikes and use of heavy weapons in Chin State, Sagaing Region, Karen State, Kachin State, Arakan, and many other areas where our communities reside. Both in these areas and in nationwide prisons and interrogation centers, the patriarchal and misogynistic military is targeting women and girls with the most brutal forms of sexual violence. Rohingya are now facing a growing risk of the military's genocidal attacks: over the past two years, the junta has issued and reissued policies and restrictions to arrest and detain at least 2700 Rohingya, including over 800 women." [1]

Rage at the solitude in which the martyred population has been left by the so-called "international community", while it has engaged in resistance to the dictatorship with immense courage. **Rage**, because if the deserved help had been given in time, the putsch would have been aborted and a thousand sufferings would have been avoided. **Admiration** at the capacity of so many organisations, so many people, to face the worst of adversities. **Hope**, because although the junta was not driven out of the country, it was not able to stabilise its rule, despite all the support it received from the great powers China and Russia, but also from India and Pakistan with their considerable regional weight, from Vietnam and its (other) neighbours, Laos and Thailand... Today, it would only controls militarily half of the territory, or a little more, and has not succeeded in breaking the spirit of popular resistance. This is why the Women's Peace Network calls it an *attempted* coup.

Two years on: the violence of repression, the successes of the resistance

Everyone commemorates the second anniversary of the military coup in their own way [2].

The resistance organised a one-day "silent strike" from 10am to 3pm in many parts of the country, a "dead city" operation. Abroad, rallies were held in front of embassies, shouting at the name of dictator-general Min Aung Hlaing, the junta's leader. The largest of these rallies was probably held in Thailand, with several hundred demonstrators sometimes carrying a portrait of Aung San Suu Kyi or holding up three fingers, the rallying sign of the youth mobilised against the absolute monarchical order in the Thai kingdom, where a large Burmese immigrant community resides. This community is both welcomed and monitored by a regime that essentially supports the junta.

The junta, after extending the state of emergency for another six months, imposed martial law in 37 localities (within eight regions and states), including the strongholds of the resistance in the regions of Sagaing and Magwe. It gives full powers to regional commanders and military courts will deal with any criminal case they consider to be a challenge to the regime. It announces that the death penalty and life sentences will be handed down. No appeals against the verdicts will be allowed, except in the case of the death penalty, in which case appeals may be submitted to... Generalissimo Min Aung Hlaing himself, for final decision.

In 2021, the regime had already declared martial law in parts of Yangon (Rangoon), Mandalay and Chin State. Nearly 100 people were sentenced to death [3].

What is the toll of the junta's campaign of terror over the past two years? According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), more than 2,500 people have been killed (including some 300 in military interrogation and detention centres), more than 16,500 others have been arrested and more than 13,000 are still being held today. 138 death sentences were handed down, 41 of which were *in absentia*. In July, four political prisoners accused of "terrorism" were hanged. These were the first executions since the late 1980s. In November, seven students from Dagon University were sentenced to death.

It is estimated that at least 1.1 million people have been displaced by the war (some say three million). More than 40,000 buildings - houses, religious buildings, schools, health facilities - are reported to have been razed or burnt down by the junta [4].

However, despite this campaign of terror and the army's overwhelming superiority in armaments, the military situation has evolved against the junta. General Min Aung Hlaing himself acknowledged, on the anniversary of the coup d'état of 1er February 2021, during a meeting of the general staff, that *"The state of the nation has not yet returned to normal: more than a third of the districts are not fully under military control.* A euphemism that amounts to an admission of failure. Speaking to the National Defence and Security Council, he said *that his regime was in control of only 60% of Myanmar's 330 townships, while 132 remain strongly contested.* [5] The initiative is currently with the resistance. Tatmadaw is suffering serious setbacks in Chin, Shan, Karen and Kachin states, as well as in the Sagaing and Magwe regions.

In addition to military casualties, more than 500 members or supporters of the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP, the military's political arm), junta-appointed administrators, militias and suspected informers were killed by the resistance. Government buildings and about 500 telecommunication towers were destroyed or damaged.

Burma's future remains open, despite everything. An entire chapter in the country's history has been closed in a paroxysmal crisis. The junta wanted to ensure that the military ruling caste would restore a *monopoly* on power over the whole of society, but this power is now being challenged. A return to the situation before the putsch seems impossible, as the last attempt at a peaceful democratic transition was aborted in a bloodbath. There is something definitive about this failure. Generations of senior officers have come and gone, but the army has not changed and will not change. The current struggles are no longer about imposing an 'acceptable' compromise on Tatmadaw, but about defeating it once and for all.

A look back at the spring 2021 revolution

The focus today is on the situation two years after the putsch of 1er February 2021, commemoration of 'anniversaries' obliges. Anyone unfamiliar with Burma's history might think that Tatmadaw seized power in 2021, overthrowing a civilian government. In fact, it was in March 1962 that a junta, then led by General Ne Win (he retired

in 1988 and died in 2002), conquered it [6]. It has never really abandoned it since. Ne Win claimed to be both a socialist (it was fashionable then, but he was not) and an anti-communist (which he was). He plunged the country into dictatorship, isolation and bankruptcy. Determined to break this deadlock, General Than Shwe partially liberalised the economy and political life, allowing Burma to reintegrate into the regional market and the "international community". From 2011 to 2021, 'civil society' has developed significantly, in terms of associations, parties and trade unions, whereas previously anti-dictatorial movements were regularly broken up in blood.

In order to ensure electoral legitimacy, the army created a political party, the USDP, in the belief that it would win the 2020 elections. It spearheaded the drafting of a tailor-made constitution in 1998. This automatically gives her a blocking minority in all legislative assemblies, where 25% of the unelected seats are reserved for her, in addition to the seats her party and its allies would have won (she can thus prohibit the adoption of a constitutional amendment, which requires at least 75% of the votes). She is automatically given the leadership of key ministries (Defence, Interior and Border Security). The military institution is protected from any control by a civilian authority. The junta thus imposes its pre-eminence within the government coalition.

However, the National League for Democracy, not the USPD, won the 2020 elections by a landslide, with 82% of the vote, with Aung San Suu Kyi imposing herself on the Burmese political scene and crystallising the rejection of the military order in the central regions. Armed with her electoral legitimacy, she accepted the very risky experiment of government cohabitation with the army. However, it was quite illusory to believe that Tatmadaw would voluntarily cede its prerogatives following a legislative election, at least without massive mobilisations of the population (which Suu Kyi did not want). She gambled on a gradual shift in the civil-military balance of power within the regime. She paid an exorbitant price for this gamble: the endless detention, incommunicado detention, mass arrest and assassination of party cadres of which she was the leading figure.

The putsch and the response

So, the army's objective was not to *conquer* power - it already had it - but to *monopolise* it again, while Aung San Suu Kyi was threatening to investigate corruption cases and push her advantage beyond what Tatmadaw was willing to accept. That's why I generally refer to it as a *putsch*, rather than a coup, or a *pre-emptive* coup.

The putsch provoked a huge popular outcry. The day after, in the centre of Rangoon, the population occupied the balconies in a concert of pans, reputed to chase away the "evil spirits". Hospitals went into open dissent and high school students took to the streets. Civil servants were not left out, in the railways, in the banks. The vast majority of the country refused to be under the control of the army, to live and work under the authority of the military or their representatives. On 6 February, textile workers demonstrated in the industrial zone of Rangoon. Civil disobedience quickly spread throughout the country, culminating in a general strike on 22 February, with more than a million people marching in many places and many more multiplying work stoppages.

This spontaneous popular uprising found an effective coordination framework in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM). It was joined by representatives of nurses and health workers, high school students, civil servants (many sectors have been nationalised in Burma), women and students, private sector unions (particularly in textiles, the base of the FGWM) and the CTUM, teachers, etc. This synergy gave rise to what must be one of the largest movements of civic protest, strikes and street mobilisation in modern history. Thus, by its magnitude, this "spring revolution" immediately denied the military junta any legitimacy, any authority - and this in a country where the army presented itself as the Guardian of the Nation.

Many commentators write with a distracted pen that it was at the call of the National Unity Government (GUN) that

the population went into resistance the day after the putsch. Problem: this government did not yet exist... It only came into being on 16 April 2021, almost two months later. This is not a detail, because it overlooks the decisive role played by the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and the limitations of the NLD.

For sure, the NUG is an offshoot of the CPRH [7], founded on 5 February by NLD parliamentarians who escaped arrest. It embodies the continuity of the parliamentary majority resulting from the 2020 elections, the primary source of its legitimacy vis-à-vis the SAC (the junta). However, it is not just that. With its multi-ethnic composition and its first statements of principle, it enters into dissonance with the legacy of Aung San Suu Kyi and takes into account the entry into a new period.

A multi-headed opposition to the junta.

Geography, culture and history inevitably come into play when we want to give a presentation, however brief, of the opposition to the military regime. We will try to come back to this. Several generations met in 2020, including surviving cadres (often of student origin) from the anti-dictatorial struggles of 1988 and the younger generations of high school students and workers. The movements operating in the central plain and those rooted in the ethnic states of the border periphery have very different histories. Religious (mainly Buddhist) identities span the political spectrum, from progressive to murderous *sui generis* fascism. Social organisations often play a decisive role.

The Civil Disobedience Movement. As we have seen, it constitutes the main framework for the coordination of resistance in the central plain. It was able to emerge almost instantly thanks to the cumulative experience of previous anti-dictatorial struggles that took place on various terrains (social, electoral...) in 1988, 1990, 2007 in particular... [8] Its reactivity and vitality also reflect the development of sectoral, associative or trade union movements during the relatively liberal decade opened in 2011 and closed by the putsch of 2021.

The MDC is independent of the National League for Democracy. The extreme left is present (at least the SDUF [9]), but it is above all, it seems to me, a centre for concertation of the leaderships of social movements.

From the NLD to the NUG. In the years leading up to the coup, the National League for Democracy (NLD) was the country's leading political party under the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi. It benefited from a double legitimacy, electoral and familial: she is the daughter of Aung San, the most famous of the founders of the national army during the Second World War, who negotiated the granting of independence by the British, before being assassinated, along with six other members of the provisional government, on 19 July 1947.

Suu Kyi's courage is undeniable, but it would be a mistake to believe that she was a democrat. She may have claimed to be a 'Buddhist socialist', but she was not a people's self-management, but rather part of a traditional 'verticalist' conception of party and power. She was authoritarian and tightened laws against social rights and movements. She defended the existing (capitalist) order and the predominance of the Bamare elite (which had a large majority in the central plain) over the state. Her aura was strong in the central part of the country, but not so in the border regions, even though the League for National Democracy was established among the minorities.

Although repeatedly harassed or repressed by the military, she had always refused to go into exile and join her family in Great Britain and had received the Nobel Peace Prize for this, a prize which was however withdrawn after the Rohingya genocide, committed in 2017-2018 by the army, when she shared power with it: She had initially defended the generals tooth and nail in the international arena, going so far as to denounce the UN agencies responsible for helping the refugee populations as "accomplices of the terrorists".

The new Government of National Unity obviously retains Aung San Suu Kyi as 'State Counsellor' [10] and Win Myint

as President, but the NLD and the NUG have *de facto* entered the post Suu Kyi era.

The composition of the new government is ostensibly multi-ethnic, and it has acknowledged the wrongs done to the Rohingya and assures that the guilty must be brought to justice. It has made important commitments to a complete overhaul of the astonishingly complex and particularly unequal citizenship rights [11] by basing "citizenship on birth in Myanmar or birth anywhere as a child of Myanmar citizens". Another important commitment was to establish a genuine federalism that would be defined in cooperation with minorities [12].

According to the NUG website [13], **Heads of National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar [have been] appointed in accordance with the Federal Democracy Charter.** The *acting president*, Duwa Lashi La, is a Kachin lawyer and politician. The Prime Minister, Mahn Winn Khaing Thann, is a Karen Christian. Of course, the NUG has to show convincingly that these commitments are not cosmetic, but its constitution confirms that, on the opposition side too, a new chapter in Myanmar's history is opening.

Ethnic organisations on the periphery. Burma is shaped like a horseshoe, with the right (eastern) arm longer than the western arm. The central plain, where the Irrawaddy River runs from north to south, is bordered by mountains. The southern part of the country's coastline opens onto the Adaman Sea and the Bay of Bengal (Indian Ocean). These "ethnic organizations" operate on the periphery where seven ethnic states are formed

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/png/admin_map.png]

Present-day Burma - Administrative map.

Each ethnic state, identified by its majority group (Shan, Karen...), but generally not unique, has its own governmental or legislative institutions, political parties, as well as, often, 'armed ethnic organisations' (EAOs) that have been active for decades and may have a fluctuating relationship with the central military power. In these states, several armed organisations may coexist (or even be in conflict) as a result of splits or representing different ethnic groups. They may be supported, or even armed, by a neighbouring country, as China may do in the north. Conversely, other resistance movements have to take into account the existence of a hostile regime on their border (as in the case of the Karen state).

In the aftermath of the military putsch, spontaneous popular mobilisations broke out in many ethnic states, carried by the youth, even where the authorities remained wait-and-see, showing a feeling of rejection similar to that expressed in the central plain, of trans-ethnic solidarity between the peoples of the periphery and the Bamars. This solidarity became a decisive issue when the violence of the repression drove the inhabitants of the lowlands underground and into armed resistance.

Buddhist movements. The monastic order has some 500,000 members divided into 9 sects [14]. As official institutions, the Buddhist authorities (the Sangha) are not supposed to engage in politics, but they traditionally support the regime in place, even if it is dictatorial. After the putsch of 1er February 2021, the general staff took care to court the religious hierarchy more than ever. However, Buddhist reference movements can cover a wide political spectrum - even to the point of (quasi?) fascism: the Race and Nation Defence Organisation (Ma Ba Tha) played a key role in the Rohingya genocide. This organisation is led by Wirathu/Parmaukha, an influential and ultranationalist monk. On the eve of the coup, it was mainly promilitary monks who were vocal in calling for it.

However, under the continued pressure of the civil disobedience movement, the conservative bloc between religious authorities and the military regime has cracked. Pro-democracy monks are making their voices heard, particularly in Mandalay, Burma's second largest urban centre and an NLD stronghold, where several monasteries have entered into open dissent, leading flash mobilisations to protect the demonstrators with their presence. This had already been

the case during the "Saffron Revolution" of 2007, which saw the formation of a clandestine organisation, the "Alliance of All Burmese Monks".

Monasteries and monks, most of them young, have defied religious edicts prohibiting political activity to oppose the generals. The pro-monk faction of the clergy remains powerful, however, claiming that the regime is protecting Burma's Buddhist identity against the alleged threat of a slow Islamic takeover. Among this group is the Buddha Dhamma Parahita Foundation, an extension of the Ma Ba Tha (banned in 2017), for whom Aung San Suu Kyi was paving the way for "*an extinction of our religion, ethnicity and the entire country*" [15].

The forced transition to armed resistance

Military repression became more and more systematic, more and more deadly. It was not easy for Tatmadaw to regain control of the terrain given the massiveness of the resistance, but it soon became impossible to continue large-scale demonstrations and open-air gatherings. The streets became the scene of intense confrontations, with the population, the young people, building a multitude of makeshift barricades in working-class neighbourhoods, industrial zones and major roads to block the movement of troops, facing the soldiers equipped with helmets, improvised shields, if possible gas masks, 'armed' with slingshots or Molotov cocktails... but no protective equipment was sufficient when the live firing began, when the tanks intervened. The "Battle of Hlaing Tharyar", in a working-class district of Rangoon (Yangon), lasted four days and left at least 58 workers and students dead. [16]

Little by little, the army cordoned off the urban centres and lowland villages, imposing curfews and searching homes one by one in order to count the inhabitants and flush out activists. During the period from the general strike of 22 February to that of 8 March 2021, the dynamic of popular mobilisations continued, with nightly street mobilisations and "flash" demonstrations, but participation in these initiatives gradually narrowed to the most militant nuclei. At the beginning of March, more than 2,100 people had already been arrested and more than 200 killed, according to the Association for Assistance to Political Prisoners.

The resistance had to go underground and prepare for armed struggle, without any prior military training or proper weaponry. They turned to the ethnic movements that were ready to help them in this particularly trying moment when everything could go wrong.

As Banyar Aung notes, " In contrast, the uprising after the 2021 coup was a popular and spontaneous movement, unexpected and unplanned. People were pushed into the war after they, their relatives or their friends were met with military firepower during street protests. It was only after people rose up against the regime that the parallel civilian National Unity Government (NUG), and its People's Defense Force (PDFs) armed wing emerged to unify the scattered resistance. The NUG is rallying revolutionary forces and also establishing alliances with EAOs. " [17]

There is nothing mysterious about the course of events that led from mass civil disobedience to resistance. I didn't think I had to return to it. I was therefore very surprised to read Robert Narai's article of 1er February 2022 (which I have translated into French) [18] In the first part, Robert [19] presents the evolution of the struggles and the current situation in terms similar to mine. In the second part, he tackles more general questions, relating to the class analysis of the forces at work, in order to base, in the end, an approach that seems to me dangerously disconnected from the realities... that he himself analysed in the initial part of his article. The point that seems to me, from a political point of view, to be the most problematic concerns the idea that the transition to armed resistance was both avoidable and wrong.

I will quote extensively from this long article, partly because it presents a synthesis of very useful information, and

partly to open up the debate on a number of political issues that I think are important.

In the first part of his article, Robert explains that Tatmadaw's response to the popular uprising " *The response of the Tatmadaw was to mobilise the armed forces at its command to crush the mass movement in a wave of counter-revolutionary terror: mass evictions of state-sector workers from government-provided housing were combined with massacres throughout the country. (...) Since then, the countryside has become the key site of confrontation. Tens of thousands of youth and workers from the cities have sought safety in the ethnic-controlled borderlands, undergone guerrilla training and formed a number of armed groups under the banner of "People's Defence Forces" (PDFs) (...) Urban resistance continues in the more limited form of targeted assassinations of military personnel and their informants, while daily flash-mob demonstrations continue in major cities and townships.* "

Robert Narai adds further that " *It was the threat that this extended general strike posed to the entire ruling class that led to the counter-revolutionary terror that followed. Mass evictions of railway workers, nurses, civil servants and bank workers were combined with the carnage in Hlaing Tharyar and the bloodbaths that took place elsewhere across the country. The seemingly indiscriminate nature of the violence had the sole purpose of paralysing the engine of mass struggle and crushing the social soul at the heart of the revolutionary process.* " As one of Narai's interviewees noted via encrypted communications, " *We are used to strikes in factories, but going on strike against armed military is different. We have never participated in political strikes before. But the students have a lot of experience in this area. And around here, many workers know that students always support workers when they go on strike We are used to strikes at the factories but striking against the military with guns is different. We have not engaged in political strikes before. But the students have plenty of this experience. And around these parts, many workers know that the students always support the workers when they strike.* "

" *The targeting of these activists and the practical outlawing of most trade unions in Myanmar since the coup has been a calculated move to uproot these networks and deny them the capacity to act. One of the effects of the repression has been the severing of these links, albeit not entirely. Underground organising of workers at the point of production continues under the new military regime, despite the extreme difficulties and danger involved.* " What is strange is that in the process, Narai laments: " *But the overall trend among the left has been to abandon the promotion of working-class self-activity and join the proliferation of armed groups that have emerged after the defeat of the March general strike.* "

We had clearly reached the point where the expansion of the armed struggle into the lowlands had become a vital necessity, including to allow for the continuation of social resistance in urban and industrial areas: activists in too much danger had to be able to find refuge in the countryside, the army had to be forced to disperse its units throughout the country, and the impunity of the forces of repression had to end.

To my knowledge, no significant organisation in Burma has "chosen" armed struggle without being forced to do so, as has been the case in other countries, such as the Philippines, where the CPP (in the tradition of José Maria Sison) believes that it should always be considered the "principal form" of struggle. It would be equally erroneous to say that in all circumstances, engaging in armed struggle would mean deserting the social struggles of the popular strata.

Robert Narai notes that the National Unity Government (NUG) has called for the "people's revolutionary war" and the formation of the "People's Defence Forces" (PDF) and goes on to describe the development of armed resistance: " *There are two types of PDFs currently fighting Min Aung Hlaing's regime: autonomous local defence forces and those directly linked to the NUG's ministry of defence. The local groups developed out of grassroots struggles against security forces, and largely operate independently from the NUG. Meanwhile, the other armed groups maintain stronger connections to the NUG: some have been directly created by the NUG, while others have sought to associate themselves more closely with the parallel government.* "

Two years after the military putsch, Myanmar's forgotten war

Two main factors, however, "currently hindering the NUG's 'revolutionary war'. The first is their lack of heavy armaments, which makes it difficult for the PDFs to capture and hold territory and counter the Tatmadaw's superior ground and airpower. The other is their lack of a centralised command and control structure able to overcome that of the Tatmadaw. All of this presentation seems accurate to me and quoting Narai at length saves me from having to repeat it.

Where it gets tricky is when Robert condemns "members of the Burmese left who join the armed people's militias" who would necessarily be serving a form of capitalist restoration from above, of bourgeois democracy, under the aegis of the NUG. In the flood of denunciation of this "disastrous" orientation, he notes, however, that "This is not to deny that some armed component will be [I emphasis] necessary to overthrow Min Aung Hlaing; but the goal for those committed to seeing the tasks of Myanmar's unfinished revolution succeed (political and economic democracy, land to small farmers and self-determination for the ethnic minorities) should not be aiding the construction of a new "bureaucratic-military machine" that is unable to solve any of these problems. "Certainly, the objective of the struggles (armed or not) must be the construction of a new Burma for the benefit of the working classes, in defence of social and national rights. But it is rather strange to use the future tense here to talk about a war that is raging today and to invoke "some armed component" ("This is not to deny that some armed component will be necessary") when there is already a multitude of them [20].

Pending an indefinite future, the condemnation of those activists who have now joined the resistance is unmistakable: "The militarised approach represents a fundamental rupture with the revolutionary movement seen in the early weeks of February and March 2021. Where strikes and mass demonstrations gave other workers confidence and drew them and broader layers into the struggle, bombings, targeted assassinations and gunfights achieve the opposite. Tragically, the increasing militarisation of the resistance is helping consolidate a political terrain that excludes the democratic and popular participation of the working class and "the people".

Against all evidence, Robert Narai argues that the overthrow of military rule was possible in the spring of 2021 and that it was the engagement in the armed struggle that frustrated the masses from this attainable victory. He concludes that all the movements that led the resistance "betrayed" the cause. I have already written about the NLD under Aung San Suu Kyi: it has indeed contributed to the stifling of democratic and social movements. Condemning Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) and MLA, the trade union centre and coalition that launched the extended general strike on 8 March, as treasonous is another matter! (I quote: "The strategy pursued by the Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar (CTUM) and the Myanmar Labour Alliance (the 16-member trade union body that launched the 8 March extended general strike) also bears responsibility for the defeat.").

The CRPH, founded by parliamentarians linked to the NLD, is composed primarily of members of the elite? Certainly, and it is necessary to favour the self-organisation of popular struggles, their class independence. However, it is problematic, to say the least, to claim that the NLD and the CRPH "played an important role in the defeat of the extended general strike" by "promoting the "right to self-defence" in mid-March (after a month and a half of calling for "peaceful protest" in the face of massacres by the Tatmadaw) they helped channel widespread sentiment that Min Aung Hlaing would need to be overthrown by armed force into abandoning the struggle at the point of production for the "people's revolutionary war".

Was victory possible in March 2021? Yes, on one *achievable* condition, which curiously Robert does not mention: decisive international assistance and solidarity on the diplomatic front, sanctions commensurate with the stakes, the supply of arms to various components of the resistance (in the ethnic states), and multi-faceted international aid. In particular, Washington has not used the exorbitant power that allows the US justice system to prosecute any entity using the dollar for transactions that conflict with US interests.

Our weaknesses are also to blame. Many of us did everything we could to help the resistance to the putsch, on the

humanitarian and political level, and then on the financial level (for our part, we quickly started to raise funds, as we participated in campaigns against "our" oil company Total). However, we must recognise the limits of our actions and the difficulties we face in making Burma's forgotten war an issue in our own countries (the most active support came from neighbouring countries, including Thailand and the Philippines).

In these conditions, we must begin by recognising that what was accomplished by the movements that initiated the resistance to the putsch of 1er April is remarkable, extraordinary (out of the ordinary). In terms of treason, one can do better. We must not rewrite history with "ifs", which is what Robert does, it seems to me. As we say in French, "avec des "si" on mettrait Paris en bouteille" ("*with 'if' we could put Paris in a bottle*").

Robert Narai argues that there are two main factors that explain why the Myanmar working class failed to overthrow the Min Aung Hlaing regime in the great wave of strikes in February-March: the inability to create a second governmental power of the working masses and the absence of a deep-rooted revolutionary organisation. He (rightly) looks for and highlights examples of population-strikers' mutual aid, strike committees taking direct control of production, the fusion between strike committees and neighbourhood self-defence organisations. All of these things show the depth and inventiveness of a popular uprising. To conclude: "*Unfortunately, these revolutionary initiatives never congealed into a coherent system of collective self-management. In order to rise to the level of a revolutionary government of the toiling masses these experiences would need to be generalised at both a local and national level. They would also need to penetrate into the centres of capital accumulation that remained largely unscathed by the strikes, in particular the gas fields of the Andaman Sea and the jade mines of Kachin state. In doing so, they could have begun to provide a basis for a network of workers' councils that could eventually challenge for power.*"

He considers that the general strike committees formed in mid-February could have given impetus to the creation of a national dual power body to confront the junta and offer an alternative, proletarian legitimacy to the NUG, initiating a dynamic of transitional demands carried by a "*revolutionary government of the working masses*". He adds that the "*forms of workers' power*" should have been established in the capital Naypyitaw, which they were unable to do, so as not to allow the military to "*spend the most difficult days*".

For Robert Narai, it is 'reasonable' to think that all this could have happened before Tatmadaw took the initiative. I'm afraid it's unreasonable to think so. We are talking about a six-week period! Again, what has been achieved in that very short time is already worthy of the greatest admiration. Its lessons are exceptional and both the successes and the limitations of what has been achieved deserve to be analysed, but let us not demand the impossible after the fact...

Even if established revolutionary political organisations had existed in February 2021, it is doubtful that this would have been enough without more decisive international help, but in any case, they were still to be built, as Robert himself notes. He uses the singular here (a revolutionary organisation), whereas I prefer to use the plural, because the pluralism of the revolutionary movement often imposes itself as a given that must be positively accepted, or else it will be fractured.

I would like to conclude with two questions.

- The flexibility of strategies and tactics. It goes without saying that tactics are concrete, but so are strategies. Burma experienced two major turning points in quick succession: the putsch of 1er April and its failure, and then the ability of Tatmadaw to regain the initiative by carrying out a large-scale campaign of terror. The articulation of the forms of struggle was obviously not the same in February and March. In the first stage, it was a matter of dynamically combining, within a vast movement of civil disobedience, democratic and social struggles, anchoring in places of production as well as in working-class neighbourhoods and industrial zones, urban centres and the countryside. In a second phase, the factor of "armed resistance" comes decisively into play, whereas it was previously absent, which

implies an increased weight of the rural areas and links with the ethnic armed solidarity organisations - trying to maintain active resistance in the urban centres, or even to take the initiative there too.

When key parameters of the situation change, the strategy is modified. Let's say that in February, a strategy of unarmed "mass uprising" corresponded to the situation in the central plain, knowing that this type of popular uprising takes territorial forms as much as in the centres of production, rural as much as urban, social as much as political.

We are entering an intermediate phase in March where armed resistance is becoming necessary, but where it is probably still difficult to develop an appropriate strategy, as long as the evolution of the balance of power remains undecided. **We now know that armed resistance is a long-term process, not a short-term one.** Robert Narai nevertheless does dismiss the question of the "people's revolutionary war" declared by the NUG - and yet we must address it.

There is a wide range of Asian experiences of people's armed struggle or resistance - both ancient (China, Vietnam, etc.) and very contemporary (including the Philippines). The vocabulary does not matter here: people's war, protracted revolutionary war... Nothing is ever transposable from one country to another, from one historical period to another. However, these experiences allow us to reflect on many questions: the relationship between the mobilisation of social forces in the revolutionary process and agrarian reform, the authoritarian danger that armed organisations can pose to their social bases and the means of combating it, the defence of and respect for the rights of popular communities and mountain populations in a situation of acute militarisation, the methods of settling conflicts between armed movements (even progressive ones), etc. It is obviously not a question of defining the right strategy thousands of miles away, but of learning and transmitting the lessons of these experiences in their specific, original or more general aspects.

- Who should represent Myanmar in international forums? We cannot ignore this question, a very important battleground. The equation is quite simple.

We are in favour of excluding the SAC from all regional and international bodies. It cannot represent Myanmar in no case and no where.

To stick to the situation before the coup (which many chancelleries do) is to recognise the representativeness of the NLD civilian government under Aung San Suu Kyi and to ignore everything that has happened since.

The last option is to ask for the recognition of the NUG, which embodies the continuity of the elected civilian parliamentary authority, but also takes note of the major developments on the recognition of the Rohingya genocide, democratic rights and citizenship, multi-ethnic representation, the co-elaboration of a confederal project... It is not a question of taking the GNU's word for it regarding the future respect of its commitments or claiming that it will establish a socialist democracy. It is first of all a statement of fact: there is no other legitimate choice that is diplomatically acceptable. We must say so.

I would add that we are fortunate in that the NUG is not, for the most part, a government in exile, cut off from the country. Protected by the Karen state, cadres continue to operate on the ground and some have paid with their lives. Military cooperation with the PDFs is a necessity in many places, even on the part of units that do not want to come under the command (effective or symbolic) of the NUG Minister of Defence.

The confederal project and Bamar

ethno-nationalism

What the GNU is calling for will not be easy to implement, as it involves a radical break with what the National League for Democracy under Aung San Suu Kyi was, both in terms of its policies towards the upland peoples and its complicity in the Rohingya genocide. There is a long history to overcome.

Bamar elites and ethno-nationalism

Let us recall that in Myanmar, the central plain is bordered by mountains and that the sea front, in the southern part, borders the Indian Ocean.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/geographical.jpg>]

Burma - geographical map.

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/carteasie.jpg>

Burma (Myanmar) in Asia. DR.

In this configuration, the central power is Bamar, supposed to embody, in the colonial tradition, the 'useful' country. The regime bases its legitimacy on the defence of 'its' Burma against the figure of 'the other', the non-Bamar peoples of the periphery. The Bamar social elites, to which Aung San Suu Kyi belongs, are culturally ethno-nationalist. This is one of the reasons why Suu Kyi was able to cohabit for a time with the army and defend it after the Rohingya genocide.

Suu Kyi is the daughter of Aung San, the best-known founder of the National Army during World War II and, in 1939, of the Burmese Communist Party (BCP). He was assassinated, along with six other members of the provisional government, on 19 July 1947 by a far-right leader. The formation of this army during the war is marked by reversals of alliances and there was not, as in China, a long process of combining people's war, national liberation struggle and social revolution. The PCB had undeniable roots in the history of popular struggles, but it remained exclusively Bamar in composition.

Aung San Suu Kyi's stature is partly due to this relationship. The ambivalence of her relationship with the army probably also stems from this. She did not want to tarnish her historical aura while seeking to assert the pre-eminence of the civilian government against the Tatmadaw general staff, her own legitimacy being electoral. Moreover, the political tradition in which it is embedded is that of a 'verticalist', authoritarian left. In the relatively democratic period before the 2021 coup, when 'civil society' was rapidly developing, Suu Kyi refused to rely on it and its autonomous mobilisations. Thus, ethno-nationalism and verticalism appear to be two of the factors that have contributed to the failure of an otherwise very uncertain democratic transition.

The Rohingya genocide. The Rohingyas have long lived in Burma, on the shores of the Bay of Bengal, and many of them were recognised as full citizens. Rohingya means "inhabitants of Rohang", more commonly known as Arakan/Rakhine State – so, "inhabitants of Arakan". The military regime denies them the right to call themselves that, considering them foreigners. This population has been subjected to various campaigns of discrimination and even massacres, as in 2012, leading in 2017-2018 to a genocide and the massive flight of the survivors (some 750,000 refugees, many of them in Bangladesh or wandering between various other countries).

The extreme right-wing nationalist wing of Burmese Buddhism has played a large role in the demonisation and dehumanisation of the Rohingyas. As is often the case, behind the heated rhetoric in defence of 'sacred' causes - in

the name of religious identity or ethno-nationalism - lie very down to earth issues. The genocide would probably not have taken place if it had not been necessary to clear the land where the Muslims lived for the construction of a deep-water port, an industrial zone and new infrastructure to benefit the generals, India and China. This is where the 'Burma Corridor' linking southern China to the high seas ends. The policy of "corridors" allows the Chinese regime to shorten trade, to invest massively in the countries concerned (there is also a "Pakistan corridor"), to strengthen its influence on its periphery and to circumvent a possible blockade that the US army could carry out at the level of the Strait of Malacca, further east.

The genocide has been covered up in Burma and no substantial solidarity has been shown by the Bamar or by ethnic states. Although it was the army that committed the genocide, Aung San Suu Kyi initially aggressively defended the generals in the international arena, going so far as to denounce the UN aid agencies as "accomplices of the terrorists". In the face of the outcry, she acknowledged the existence of the problem (without admitting its seriousness) and declared that she would organise the return of refugees after verifying their citizenship (which had been withdrawn!). She still refused to pronounce their name (Rohingya). And left it at that.

The young Burmese generation now seems ready to face this heavy past. Bamar people who are now suffering from the merciless violence of Tatmadaw are experiencing in their flesh the fate of the Rohingya and feel guilty for having looked away in 2017-2018. Although the new National Unity Government acknowledged the genocide in its statement of 3 June 2021 and stated that those responsible for this crime should be tried and convicted, representatives of Rohingya associations remain sceptical about this *mea culpa* and ask to be judged on their own merits, but recognise that a new "possibility" is opening up on the side of the opposition to the junta, while nothing can be expected on the Tatmadaw side. It is quite possible that other members of the GNU than Aung San Suu Kyi were personally involved in some form of genocide cover-up.

Military cooperation between the oppositions and Tatmadaw

This is one of the factors that will decisively affect the future of Myanmar. In 2021, there was no armed progressive organisation in the Bamar Central Plain, as the NLD coexisted in power with the military. The political and social activists and cadres who went underground had no such expertise or weapons, and travel to peripheral ethnic states for help and protection was very dangerous. Two years later, with experience, the picture has changed.

Nevertheless, the situation can still vary greatly from place to place and the resistance still has to fight with very rudimentary means at times [\[21\]](#) The degree of commitment of armed ethnic organisations against the junta still varies, but it is greater than in the past. On the ground, the situation is often complicated. Here is how it is now, according to Banyar Aung, in an article dated 31 January 2023. [\[22\]](#)

"The scale of the ongoing armed revolution is unprecedented in Myanmar. Regime forces are overstretched and exhausted, fighting on multiple fronts across the country. The military is often unable to send reinforcements when a base comes under attack. Instead, it has increasingly relied on artillery and air attacks, part of a scorched-earth strategy against civilians to dent their faith in revolution." Fighting has been most intense in Kachin, Chin, Kayah (Karen), Karen and Mon states, as well as in Sagaing and Magwe areas. Resistance forces are again able to carry out attacks in urban areas, including major cities such as Yangon and Mandalay. More than 8,000 clashes of various sizes have been recorded since the coup. Not a day goes by without the Myanmar army suffering casualties. Not surprisingly, it is having difficulty recruiting new soldiers.

The NUG has so far created about 300 battalions and has links with some 400 local PDF units. With a PDF battalion

of about 200 men, the NUG has assembled an army of about 60,000 resistance fighters, not including other popular defence groups. *"Though the NUG has yet to unify all resistance forces under a single command, it has made impressive progress developing a nationwide network of resistance forces over the past two years. Many of those resistance fighters have undergone basic military training and have gained combat experience. But arming all of its battalions, not to mention local PDFs, remains a challenge for the NUG. However, the mob that fought the Myanmar military with rudimentary hunting rifles and homemade weapons has evolved into a regimented armed force equipped with modern automatic rifles and drones."*

The picture of armed ethnic organisations and their degree of involvement in the resistance to the junta is very complex. This is what Banyar Aung says:

- The hardened troops of the ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) include the Kachin Independence Army, the Karen National Union, the Chin National Front, the Chinland Defence Force, the Karenni National Progressive Party, the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force and the Burma Students' Democratic Front. Their combined forces of 45,000 soldiers are cooperating fully with the pro-democracy spring revolution to overthrow the regime.
- Although the Arakan Army, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army and the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army have been involved in fewer clashes with the junta's troops, all three groups are supporting the Spring Revolutionary Forces with weapons or equipment. They also pose a serious threat to the regime, as clashes between the junta's troops and the three EAOs, whose combined strength is around 45,000, could erupt at any time.
- Three other EAOs, with a combined strength of around 45,000 - the United Wa State Army, the National Democratic Alliance Army and the Shan State Progress Party - are barely involved in the country's resistance forces. But they do not fight for the regime either, preferring the role of interested bystanders.
- Two other groups, the Shan State Restoration Council and the New Mon State Party, with a combined strength of about 10,000 troops, have taken a neutral position in the fighting, but also make agreements with the regime.
- The signatories of the nationwide ceasefire agreement, namely the Karen Democratic Volunteer Army, the Karen National Union/Karen National Liberation Council/Peace Council, the Palaung National Liberation Organisation, the Arakan Liberation Party and the Lahu Democratic Union, are under the control of the regime. But they are unlikely to join the *Border Guard Force* and pro-regime militias to fight alongside junta forces.

" So, it is fair to say the majority of EAOs have sided with the anti-regime forces. Revolutionary forces still have certain weaknesses, though. They are not yet fully armed, they have few weapons to counter airstrikes, they lack artillery and they are not yet under a single chain of command needed to conduct synchronized attacks.."

Change of period for Tatmadaw. Tatmadaw was known for its cohesion. It had become the ruling faction of society and could represent a channel for social advancement. Beyond its divisions and rivalries, the senior officers' corps defended its political prerogatives and its economic empire (the 'kaki' economy) in solidarity. It still retains important sources of income, 'legal' or not (such as border trafficking) and maintains its hold on the conscripts (one per family) by threat. As long as troops were sent to fight ethnic organisations ('the other'), this cohesion was maintained. Once repression hit the Bamar populations, a series of defections occurred (estimated at 2,000 soldiers, but also 6,000 policemen). These could continue as the army suffers costly setbacks. In the past, the Tatmadaw operated intermittently in a limited number of theatres of operation, in some ethnic states only. Today the entire country is a war zone, which poses new operational challenges.

However, the enemy should not be underestimated. The junta still has the means to buy support, to play on rivalries,

to co-opt a few defectors [23]... It is constantly reinforcing its armaments: aircraft, tanks...

The associative and trade union movements

Burma has seen a belated upheaval in its social formation with the economic and political liberalisation measures that were implemented from 2011 onwards – “*broad-ranging process*” in the words of the *Asian Labor Review* (ALR) in the introduction to its interview with trade unionist Ma Tin Tin Wai [24]. The “*quasi-civilian*” government calling for “*the expansion of foreign direct investment and international trade.*” The subsistence economy in the countryside rapidly shrank, leading to a rural exodus to wage employment in the manufacturing industries of urban centres. There are still family ties between urban workers and the urban poor and the peasantry that were activated when repression hit anti-junta activists.

"A majority of the urban workforce, including a large number of women, is employed in the garment sector that contributes significantly to the country's national income. Along with economic liberalisation, labour market formalisation was undertaken to enforce legal labour protections, maintain the integrity of the investments and provide stable work environments required for undisrupted production", the Asian Labour Review notes that the Labour Organisation Act enacted in 2011 "significantly changed the nature of labour relations and the labour market, ushering in new social security systems, mandatory employment contracts, minimum wage, and labour dispute resolution mechanisms. However, those policies failed to adequately protect workers' rights. The state remained committed to protecting the interests of employers as their interests were aligned."

Thus, the legalisation of trade unions, the institutionalisation of collective bargaining [25] and the creation of an arbitration body composed of former military and business representatives have not had the desired effect of securing the social order that was challenged at the end of Than Shwe's reign: Shortly after the first labour law was passed in 2011, the industrial districts of Hlaing Tharyar, Shwepyithar and Hmawbi on the outskirts of Yangon saw a new wave of strikes, leading to the creation of dozens of new factory unions. As Robert Narai summarises: “*Another wave of strikes engulfed the garment sector in 2015-17, including a 2017 riot in which hundreds of workers descended on the Hangzhou Hundred-Tex Garment factory on the outskirts of Yangon, damaging factory vehicles, breaking windows, wrecking machinery, attacking management and taking several managers hostage. (The riot followed a 15-month strike over unpaid overtime that resulted in the factory's union leader being fired.) Then, in 2019, garment workers led another wave of wildcat strikes before COVID-19 was used to crack down on militancy.* »

Even today, notes the ALR, “*Even under the present military regime that relentlessly cracks down on strikes, sentences to death pro-democracy supporters, and restricts freedom of speech and labour activism, we can still see spontaneous outbreaks of protests organised by workers in their factories.*” For example, the Federation of General Workers of Myanmar (FGWM, formerly known as the Garment Workers' Federation), for which Ma Tin Tin Wai speaks, has “*20 factory-level trade unions is at the forefront of the resistance against the junta, and organising against the capitalist exploitation of workers in Myanmar. It has been supporting people from the Civil Disobedience Movement to form unions. For these reasons, their leaders have been targeted by the military junta and driven into exile.*” [26]

The militant revival also manifested itself in the rural areas and on campuses. Robert Narai [26] points out that the establishment by the USDP government of a land dispute agency, staffed by former state officials, has triggered a number of struggles by small farmers to reclaim land confiscated under the Than Shwe dictatorship. “*These struggles were most acute in areas across the Irrawaddy Delta, the Monywa and Sagaing regions, and in a number of ethnic-minority areas.*” Students fought to re-establish their trade unions, which had been banned under the previous dictatorship (“*encountering strong resistance from university administrations and supporters of the former regime.*”) In this combative climate, political associations emerged where “*students could discuss and debate political*

topics openly for the first time in over five decades. A number of more explicitly radical forums also flourished, including Marxist discussion circles in Yangon."

This trade union, associative and political ferment was temporarily placed under a leaden cap by the putsch of 1er April 2021, but it is currently resuming, albeit in the new circumstances of the civil war. [27]

Geopolitical impact

On the diplomatic front, support for the resistance is growing, although it remains very measured, while the positions of the military regime are deteriorating.

- **United States.** Last December, the US passed the *Burma Act*, committing the US to help restore civilian governance in Myanmar and to hold human rights abusers accountable. It also provides for non-military assistance to anti-government forces. *"The US decision to directly engage with EAOs, PDFs and the NUG is a significant departure from its previous reform push, which was centered on the Myanmar military. This decision demonstrates that Washington no longer believes negotiation with the junta is a practical solution. Further actions on top of the Burma Act can now be expected from the US."* [28]

The United States, Britain, Canada and Australia (which has been particularly criticised for its slowness on this issue) have announced tougher international sanctions [29], followed by the European Union (but not Japan at all). Justice for Myanmar welcomes the new package of measures adopted by Brussels *"more than two years after the illegal coup attempt"* [30]. Depending on the country, these sanctions may concern the expansion of the blacklist of SAC members and companies or conglomerates under the control of the military, or the supply of fuel for the Burmese air force.

- **China.** China is reassessing the situation. It is not being ideological. The CCP previously had very good relations with Aung San Suu Kyi, but nevertheless gave decisive support to the junta after the putsch of 1er April 2021. Beijing's priority is to deal with a power that can guarantee the stability of the regime in place, the security of its numerous investments and the protection of Chinese companies established in the country. The SAC is currently unable to meet these requirements.

Beijing scaled back high-level relations with the junta and did not attend the second Lancang-Mekong cooperation meeting. China did not veto a UN resolution condemning the military regime. It suspended major investment projects, including in the strategic corridor leading to the Arakan (Rakhine State) maritime border.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/access.jpg>]

Burma (Myanmar) provides direct access to the Indian Ocean, i.e. west of the Strait of Malacca which 'locks' the South China Sea. DR.

In late December 2022, meetings were held in China's border province of Yunnan with seven ethnic organisations from northern Burma. The aim was to activate or establish contacts while waiting to see how Washington would implement its new policy. [31]

- **ASEAN.** Under the pressure of events and international opprobrium, ASEAN member governments were forced to take a stand on the situation in Burma (their golden rule being never to 'interfere' in each other's affairs, but to deal only with regional issues of common concern). They divided. In a 'five-point consensus' declaration adopted in April

2022, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore called for the restoration of the democratic process, but the other countries accepted what they saw as a fait accompli in favour of Generalissimo Min Aung Hlaing. In any case, General Hlaing is ignoring the majority declaration.

For Thitinan Pongsudhirak, in fact, ASEAN "has been impotent in promoting peaceful dialogue and is in danger of passive complicity with the Tatmadaw's atrocious crimes against its own people. Myanmar has taken Asean for a ride in pursuit of legitimacy." [32]

• **Unwavering support.** Among the few countries currently offering support to the regime are Russia, Belarus, India and Japan.

Russia and Belarus are engaging with the regime mainly to sell arms. Although unlikely to invest heavily in Myanmar, Russia is partnering with the (retired) generals in local tourism development [33].

India and Japan are openly cooperating with the regime. "Delhi has sent high-level delegations to Myanmar. It also turned a blind eye recently when the regime used Indian airspace to attack the headquarters of the Chin National Revolutionary Front near the Indian border, resulting in bombs landing on Indian soil. Japan cooperates with the regime through the president of the Nippon Foundation, Yohei Sasakawa, and former Japanese MP Hideo Watanabe, who has influence in Japanese government circles.

The main intention of India and Japan, however, is to counterbalance China's political and economic influence in Myanmar. But the two countries have neither veto power in the UN Security Council nor influence over ASEAN. And they have relatively little investment in military-ruled Myanmar. So the regime cannot expect much from the two countries." [34]

Solidarity

The current year promises to be decisive. The balance of power is changing favourably and victory against the military order is possible, but the human cost of the civil war is very high, very heavy to bear for the population. For this terrible ordeal to finally end, the resistance forces must receive the help they need, on all levels and without delay.

In the face of the 1988 and 1990 crises, the 'international community' was divided between those who favoured a policy of sanctions (which were not effective enough to make the junta back down) and those who favoured 'constructive engagement' aimed at reaching a compromise with the Burmese army through negotiation. This policy (which had its supporters in French academia and European Union circles) failed miserably.

It is very difficult to make the forgotten war in Burma a political issue in a country like France. However, together with all the other French components of solidarity, we can make our contribution to a multiform international solidarity movement that is not without effectiveness, far from it. Act, therefore, for :

° Join the international solidarity initiatives that are gaining momentum as evidenced by the declaration of August 19, 2022 gathering 369 signatures, referring to 57 countries [35]

• Impose the complete diplomatic isolation of the SAC. The NUG must, for the time being, ensure the continuity of the legal representation of the Union of Myanmar in all international and regional bodies (ASEAN...).

- Denounce and sanction the companies that continue to provide, directly or indirectly, the financial and military means for the junta to pursue its war see.
- Demand the unconditional release of all political prisoners.
- Obtain a significant increase in aid, including military aid, to the resistances, so that they receive, among other things, the means to protect the population from air strikes and armoured assault.
- Provide security and decent living conditions for forcibly displaced people in Burma and refugees in Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Thailand and other countries in South and South East Asia.
- Provide militant support to the various components of the resistance, both political and financial. The association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières has, for its part, ensured permanent monitoring of the situation in Burma via its website and sent €4500 in 2022, paid into the common pot of solidarity movements present on the country's borders.

Source [ESSE](#).

Glossary

This glossary will be expanded and detailed later.

AAPP: Assistance Association for Political Prisoners.

ABFTU: All Burma Federation of Trade Unions.

ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Bamar: Name or adjective which designates the ethnic group very largely in the central plain in Burma.

Burma / Myanmar: these two terms are used here as synonyms, covering the whole country within its current borders.

CDM: Civil Disobedience Movement, formed immediately after the coup. It was independent of the NLD.

CRPH: Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, founded on February 5, 2021 by parliamentarians of the League for Democracy (NLD) to ensure the continuity of the civil authority of the Lower House. The parliament in resistance.

CTUM: Confederation of Trade Unions Myanmar.

EAOs / EROs: Ethnic Armed Organizations, Ethnic Resistance Organizations.

Two years after the military putsch, Myanmar's forgotten war

FGWM: Federation of General Workers in Myanmar (formerly known as the Federation of Garment Workers).

JCC: Joint Coordination Committee.

MLA: Myanmar Labour Alliance – the 16-member trade union body that launched the 8 March extended general strike.

NUCC: National Unity Consultative Committee.

NUG: National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, established on April 16, 2021 by the CRPH.

NUCC: National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC), and also a committee member of the Joint Coordination Committee (JCC)

NLD: National League for Democracy.

PDF: People's Defence Force.

SAC: State Administration Council, the name given to itself by the military junta after the putsch.

SDUF: Social Democratic United Front [Note: the use of the term "social democratic" here refers to the meaning given to this term by Lenin and the Bolsheviks].

USDP: Union Solidarity and Development Party, the political arm of the army.

PS:

If you like this article or have found it useful, please consider donating towards the work of *International Viewpoint*. Simply follow this link: [Donate](#) then enter an amount of your choice. One-off donations are very welcome. But regular donations by standing order are also vital to our continuing functioning. See the last paragraph of [this article](#) for our bank account details and take out a standing order. Thanks.

[1] Women's Peace Movement, 1 February 2023, ESSF (article 65545), [article 65545](#).

[2] For an overview of the situation, see in particular Banyar Aung, 31 January 2023, « Reviewing Myanmar's Spring Revolution, 2 Years on From the Coup », The Irrawaddy : <https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/reviewing-myanmars-spring-revolution-2-years-on-from-the-coup.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65515), [article 65515](#).

[3] Martial Law Imposed on 37 Myanmar Townships, Including Resistance Strongholds, 3 February 2023, The Irrawaddy : <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/martial-law-imposed-on-37-myanmar-townships-including-resistance-strongholds.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65553), [article 65553](#).

[4] See Rebecca Ratcliff's report from the Sagain area, January 31, 2023, *The Guardian* : <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/31/monster-from-the-sky-two-years-on-from-coup-myanmar-junta-increases-airstrikes-on-civilians>
Disponible sur ESSF (article 65540), [article 65540](#).

Two years after the military putsch, Myanmar's forgotten war

[5] Myanmar Now, 3 février 2023, « Myanmar junta imposes martial law on resistance strongholds, reshuffles cabinet and military council members » :
<https://myanmar-now.org/en/news/myanmar-junta-imposes-martial-law-on-resistance-strongholds-reshuffles-cabinet-and-military>
Available on ESSF (article 65591), [article 65591](#).

[6] On the convulsive history of the Burmese military staff, see in particular Bertil Lintner, 30 January 2023, « Will Myanmar's Brutal Military Remain United? », *The Irrawaddy* :
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/will-myanmars-brutal-military-remain-united.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65552), [article 65552](#).

[7] Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw

[8] Frédéric Debomy, 12 March 2021, « Birmanie : l'armée peut-elle un jour abandonner le pouvoir ? » ("Burma: Can the army ever give up power?", *Asialyst* :
<https://asialyst.com/fr/2021/03/12/birmanie-armee-tatmadaw-peut-elle-un-jour-abandonner-pouvoir/>
Available ESSF (article 57154), [article 57154](#).

[9] SDUF: Social Democratic United Front) [[Note: the use of the term "social democratic" here refers to the meaning given to this term by Lenin and the Bolsheviks].

[10] She was head of government and *de facto* president, but the military had introduced a special amendment into the Constitution to prevent her from becoming president, as the position could only be held by someone with two Burmese parents. Suu Kyi's husband was British, Michael Aris, who died in 1999.

[11] Juliette Gheerbrant, 4 May 2015, « L'imbroglia de la citoyenneté birmane » ("The imbroglia of Burmese citizenship"), *Asialyst* :
<https://asialyst.com/fr/2015/05/04/l'imbroglia-de-la-citoyennete-birmane/>
Disponible sur ESSF (article 58597), [article 58597](#).

[12] NUG, 3 June 2021, "Policy Position on the Rohingya in Rakhine State":
<https://gov.nugmyanmar.org/2021/06/03/policy-position-on-the-rohingya-in-rakhine-state/>
Available on ESSF (article 58468), [article 58468](#).

[13] <https://www.nugmyanmar.org/en/>

[14] On Theravada Buddhism in Burma and the modern context, see, among others; Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière, "Les moines, une troisième force dans l'équilibre transitionnel des pouvoirs en Birmanie" (Buddhist Monks: a Third Influential Force in the Transitional Balance of Power in Burma), Presses de l'Inalco, 2020:
<https://books.openedition.org/pressesinalco/37102>
Available on ESSF (article 58364), [article 58364](#).

[15] Associated Press, AFP, "Buddhist monks in Myanmar split on anti-junta movement"
<https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/buddhist-monks-in-myanmar-split-on-anti-junta-movement>
<http://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article58132>
Available on ESSF (article 58132), [article 58132](#)
Available on ESSF (article 58174), [article 58174](#).

[16] Ko Maung, 15 December 2021, "Myanmar's Spring Revolution: a history from below", *Opendemocracy*:
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/myanmars-spring-revolution-a-history-from-below/>
Available on ESSF (article 60499), [article 60499](#).

[17] Banyar Aung, 31 January 2023, « Reviewing Myanmar's Spring Revolution, 2 Years on From the Coup », *The Irrawaddy* :
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/reviewing-myanmars-spring-revolution-2-years-on-from-the-coup.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65515), [article 65515](#).

[18] Robert Narai, "Until the end of the world": Myanmar's unfinished revolution, *Marxist Left Review*.
<https://marxistleftreview.org/articles/until-the-end-of-the-world-myanmars-unfinished-revolution/>
Available on ESSF (article 62796), [article 62796](#).

[19] I have been corresponding with Robert for quite some time and his articles in *Red Flag*, the organ of Socialist Alternative (Australia), on Myanmar have often been very useful to me

Two years after the military putsch, Myanmar's forgotten war

[20] The formula "some armed component" seems to imply that, in any case, this "component" will remain minimum

[21] See for instance Aakash Hassan et Ellis-Petersen, 8 January 2023, *The Observer-The Guardian*, « Haimual : On the frontline with the rebel army fighting Myanmar's brutal junta » :
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/08/on-the-frontline-with-the-rebel-army-fighting-myanmars-brutal-junta>
Available on ESSF (article 65326), [article 65326](#).

[22] Banyar Aung, 31 January 2023, « Reviewing Myanmar's Spring Revolution, 2 Years on From the Coup », *The Irrawaddy* :
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/opinion/analysis/reviewing-myanmars-spring-revolution-2-years-on-from-the-coup.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65515), [article 65515](#).

[23] *The Irrawaddy*, 26 December 2022, 'Recruiting Renegade NLD Members is Myanmar Regime's Tactic to Divide the Party » :
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/recruiting-renegade-nld-members-is-myanmar-regimes-tactic-to-divide-the-party.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65327), [article 65327](#).

[24] *Asian Labor Review*, 31 January 2023, « "Fight on Our Own and Build Solidarity": A Conversation with Ma Tin Tin Wai of Federation of General Workers in Myanmar » :
<https://labourreview.org/fight-on-our-own/>
Available on ESSF (article 65536), [article 65536](#).

[25] ALR analysis is based on the work of Stephen Campbell, "Labour Formalisation as Selective Hegemony in Reform-era Myanmar". *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*, 2018.

[26] Ma Cheria, 31 January 2023, *Asian Labour* op. cit.

[27] More than 20 employees fired for protesting working conditions at a Yangon factory are refusing to sign a contract to be rehired, saying their demands to remedy rights violations have been ignored. Han Thit, 4 janvier 2023, "Fired Myanmar workers reject 'unfair' employment offer from Adidas shoe factory", *Myanmar Now*:
<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65296>
Available on ESSF (article 65296), [article 65296](#).

[28] Banyar Aung, op. cit.

[29] Rebecca Ratcliffe, 1 February 2023, « Myanmar junta hit by western sanctions as 'silent strikes' mark coup anniversary » :
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/feb/01/myanmars-air-force-targeted-by-sanctions-two-years-on-from-military-coup-protest-strike>
Available on ESSF (article 65539), [article 65539](#).

[30] Justice for Myanmar, 20 February 2023:

<https://www.justiceformyanmar.org/press-releases/jfm-welcomes-latest-round-of-eu-sanctions-imposed-on-the-myanmar-junta-and-its-arms-and-jet-fuel-suppliers>
Available on ESSF (article 65739), [article 65739](#).

[31] *The Irrawaddy*, 29 January 2023 :

<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/chinas-new-special-envoy-to-myanmar-meets-ethnic-armed-organizations.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65200), [article 65200](#).

[32] Thitinan Pongsudhirak, 4 February 2023, « Myanmar's Military Takeover Falters », *The Bangkok Post* :
<https://www.bangkokpost.com/opinion/opinion/2497626/myanmars-military-takeover-falters>
Available on ESSF (article 65568), [article 65568](#).

[33] *The Irrawaddy*, 6 February 2023, « Russian Business Chiefs Sign Tourist Deals for Myanmar Beach Resort » :
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/russian-business-chiefs-sign-tourist-deals-for-myanmar-beach-resort.html>
Available on ESSF (article 65585), [article 65585](#).

[34] Banyar Aung, op. cit.

[35] International Solidarity with the Myanmar People!, 19 August 2022, ESSF (article 63710), [article 63710](#).