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Unraveling Myanmar's Security Landscape: Understanding its Implications and Distinctive Features

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Unraveling Myanmar's Security Landscape: Understanding its Implications and Distinctive Features

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Abstract: Myanmar's security challenges range from ethnic conflicts, military crackdowns, human rights abuses, and illegal migration to refugee crises. Historically, Myanmar has witnessed several ups and downs in terms of political and security concerns. The February 2021 military coup has added a new dimension to the troublesome history of the country. As people protested against the coup, the military regime's response resulted in human casualties, damage to the infrastructure and backsliding of the democratic transition in the country. The working paper outlines the various political and security challenges that Myanmar has encountered over the past two years. It also examines the impact of these challenges on the region and the responses of both regional and international actors. The Myanmar experience demonstrates that the distinction between traditional and non-traditional security concerns often gets blurred. Drawing on the available primary and secondary literature, the working paper analyses Myanmar's security landscape, highlighting its characteristics and impact on the region.

Keywords: Non-traditional security, Myanmar, ASEAN, Five-Point Consensus, Humanitarian Crisis

1. Introduction

Since the February 2021 coup in Myanmar, the country has witnessed a lot of turmoil and security threats, making it a zone of multidimensional conflicts. The complex security situation in Myanmar is multifaceted, covering violence perpetrated by the state and the military, ethnic clashes, conflicts between the protesters and the armed forces, displacement, refugee crisis and migration, extortion, killings, and arbitrary arrests culminating into one of the most vigorous human rights violation case studies in the history of the modern humanity. By the mid of 2024, anti-*junta* forces (a combination of People's Defence Forces/PDF and Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs)) have captured multiple areas in Myanmar in retaliation against the military's strikes across the country. According to reports, on April 15, 2024, they attacked the Defence Services Academy in the town of Pyin Oo Lwin, situated in Mandalay, with rockets, causing casualties and infrastructure losses. (The Hindu, 2024) The domestic turbulence within Myanmar also generated crises in the neighbourhood. It has complicated Myanmar's relations with India on the one hand and with several ASEAN member-states on the other. The complications occur not only because of the illegal migration, refugee and trans-national crimes across the borders, but it has essentially elevated a debate in the neighbouring countries who are

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juggling to strike a balance between their security concerns and national interests on one side and their foreign policies, especially their relationships with Myanmar, on the other.

This working paper is based on the assumption that Myanmar's security situation goes beyond the traditional security threats and has encompassed non-traditional security threats, including arms smuggling, irregular movement of people, terrorism, international economic crimes, money laundering, border management, cyber security and illicit drugs.(ASEAN, 2016) This is founded on the argument that state-sponsored traditional security concerns can result in overarching non-traditional security threats, including illegal migration, trafficking, food insecurity, money laundering, refugee influx, displacement and so on. The second assumption of the paper is that Myanmar's domestic political turbulence has stirred the neighbourhood (both South and Southeast Asia), and countries like India and ASEAN members are forced to act and react to the current political security scenarios in Myanmar for their national security concerns. (ASEAN, undated; Wirth, 2015) In the light of this background, this working paper delves into the following questions;

- (A) What are the types of violence in Myanmar, and how impactful these violent incidents are for human security post-February 2021 coup?
- (B) Why does Myanmar's domestic political upheaval impact the region's security concerns?
- (C) How do ASEAN and India respond to the present crises in Myanmar?
- (D) Who are the prominent international actors involved in crisis management in Myanmar, and what are the solutions offered so far?

The paper is primarily based on observations and analyses offered by international agencies and organisations, reports and data published by the national authorities and international bodies, and available research papers. The paper is primarily narrative and based on qualitative research and content analyses. This paper aims to analyse Myanmar's political instability and security concerns and gauge its impact on the region in the post-February 2021 military coup.

2. What Security Means in Myanmar: Human Rights Violations, Refugee Crises, Illegal Migration and Displacement

The fundamental human rights concerns in Myanmar under the military *Junta* include extrajudicial and arbitrary killings, rape, torture, arbitrary arrests for political reasons, forced labour, forced conscription into the military, denial of freedom of movement, and tight boundaries on freedom of press, religion, speech, and assembly. (ASEAN, 2023; Arendshorst 2009) Table 1 depicts the numbers of refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Myanmar in recent times. The military coup in February 2021 has anyway refreshed the memory of violence and instability in Myanmar. As soon as the military coup happened in February 2021,

people came to the streets to protest against it. Unfortunately, the military *Junta* responded to those protests with violence, using tear gas, rubber bullets, and live ammunition against demonstrators. This resulted in numerous injuries and fatalities. There have been allegations of the mass burning of villages, particularly in areas associated with ethnic minority groups. These actions are often linked to military offensives and displacement. Reports have emerged of indiscriminate airstrikes by the Myanmar military, particularly in conflict zones. These airstrikes have resulted in civilian casualties and displacement. The military *Junta* has engaged in arbitrary arrests of activists, political figures, and ordinary citizens who oppose the coup. Many have been detained without due process. Extrajudicial killings and summary executions have been reported, with both civilians and opposition figures targeted by the military. There are reports of torture and forced disappearances of individuals, including activists and those perceived as being opposed to the military *Junta*. The military has been accused of obstructing humanitarian assistance, particularly in conflict zones, limiting access to food, medical care, and other essential services. This catastrophe has been compounded by the already existing Rohingya refugee crises and ethnic conflicts. Myanmar has a long history of ethnic and religious tensions, and violence against ethnic and religious minorities, such as the Rohingya- a longstanding issue with reports of atrocities and displacement. (Amnesty International, 2022)

An alarming total of over 17,000 arrests have been reported in the first two years since the coup, indicating the *Junta's* relentless and ruthless campaign against pro-democracy advocates. (Corrittee et al. 2023) Horrifying testimonies of torture, including incidents of sexual violence during their incarceration, have been revealed by former inmates. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented at least 273 reported deaths that occurred while in police or military custody, highlighting the dire state of human rights in the year 2022. (GIWPS, 2023) The *Junta's* closed courts are rife with injustice, with egregiously unfair trials that have become the norm and harsh penalties for anyone who opposes the ruling dictatorship have become a reality. Data from the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), a human rights organisation based in Mae Sot, Thailand and Yangon, Myanmar, indicates that by November 2022, at least 2,400 people had reportedly died at the hands of the *Junta's* security services. (UNHCR, 2022)

The military's indiscriminate use of airstrikes and artillery has caused terrible damage to infrastructure, schools, communities, and other civilian targets, forcing thousands of people to flee from their homes. The intentional targeting of medical facilities and schools has been denounced globally. Up to 30,000 civilian buildings, including schools in different areas, have been damaged by military actions. (HRN, 2022) According to the UNHCR, at least 382 children have died since the coup, making children one of the documented sufferers. (UNHCR, 2022) Almost a million people have been internally displaced by the hostilities. At the same time, an additional 70,000 have sought safety in neighbouring nations. (UNHCR, 2022) The *Junta* has flagrantly violated international humanitarian law by obstructing humanitarian aid, attacking relief workers, and destroying non-military supplies. An estimated 11 million people experience

severe food insecurity as a result of supply chain disruptions, price increases, and product scarcity. (UNHCR, 2022) According to data and reports published by the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), the *Junta's* use of excessive force has resulted in civilian casualties across various regions, including Sagaing, Shan, Chin, Bago, Magway, and Rakhine. Airstrikes have targeted areas indiscriminately, destroying schools, religious buildings, and homes, forcing thousands to flee. (UNHCR, 2022)

Moreover, artillery shelling by *Junta* forces has occurred in several townships, causing civilian deaths and injuries. Offensive operations in the Sagaing Region led to the displacement of 15,000 locals, while arson attacks in Magway and Sagaing resulted in house destruction and forced evacuations. (AAPP, 2023) Table 2 represents Myanmar's important political and security-related events since February 1, 2021.

Table 1: Number of Refugees and IDPs in Myanmar

Refugee Outflows (since February 1, 2021): Estimated at 104,100 individuals.
Refugees and Asylum-Seekers (as of June 30, 2023): Approximately 1,132,800 people from Myanmar are refugees or asylum-seekers in neighbouring countries.
Total Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) (Displaced since February 1, 2021): The estimated number is 1,858,600 individuals.
Total Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as of November 27, 2023: The estimated figure is 2,164,800 IDPs within Myanmar.

Source: UNHCR, 2023

Table 2: Incidents in Myanmar since February 2021 Showing the Non-traditional Nature of Security Concerns and Its Fallout on the Region

1 February 2021	Military takeover initiates a period of instability in Myanmar.
March 2021	First reports emerge of new arrivals from Myanmar to India as people begin to flee the unrest.
March 2021	Concurrently, Thailand starts receiving its first influx of refugees from Myanmar.
July 2021	A notable response comes with the publishing of a \$109 million Myanmar Interim Emergency Response Plan to address the escalating humanitarian needs.
January 2022	The Myanmar Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) with a funding requirement of \$826 million is launched.

December 2022	An estimate demonstrates that the refugee movements to India and Thailand since the military takeover in February 2021 have reached approximately 72,000 individuals.
January 2023	A significant boost to humanitarian efforts as the Myanmar HRP is rolled out with an increased requisite of \$764 million.
May 2023	Disaster strikes with the advent of Cyclone Mocha, heavily impacting coastal areas of Myanmar and Bangladesh, calling for Inter Agency Flash appeals worth millions (\$333 million for Myanmar and \$42 million for Bangladesh).
October 2023	Armed conflict surges once again across Myanmar, displacing an alarming number of people, reaching a total of 1,858,600 displaced individuals.
November 2023	Data reveals that of the new arrivals, 51% are women and girls, while 49% are children, though comprehensive age and gender disaggregation is limited.

Source: UNHCR and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), November 2023.

2.1 Responses and Counter-Responses by Actors: Role of the EAOs, PDF and the Alliances

In October 2023, the conflict between the military-installed government (State Administrative Council- SAC) and the armed insurgency opposing the Junta intensified, leading to civilian casualties and widespread displacement. Three EAOs (Arakan Army (AA), the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA)) joined hands together and launched Operation 1027 under the name of Three Brotherhood Alliance, aiming to eradicate the *Junta*. (Khachatryan et. al, 2024) The EAOs conducted operations across a significant portion of Myanmar, claiming to have seized over 100 military installations. In response, the military intensified its efforts to crush the opposition through artillery barrages and airstrikes. Another notable development was the increased coordination among various ethnic armed organisations (EAOs) and the People's Defence Forces (PDF), the armed wing of the anti-junta National Unity Government (NUG). Both these sides were campaigning against the military regime. The alliance between the EAOs and PDF made substantial gains in Shan state, boosting the morale of the NUG and its armed forces, particularly the PDF. Subsequently, the PDF, alongside other EAOs and militia groups, expanded their operations into western, eastern, and southern Myanmar. Notable successes included the capture of the Gangdau Yang military base by the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and the PDF's seizure of Kawlin, north of Mandalay, marking the first district capital to fall to the alliance since the coup. Additionally, a coalition of Karenni EAOs launched Operation 1111 in Kayah State, while the Arakan Army (AA) targeted military posts in Rakhine State. The Tatmadaw faced resistance not only in Shan State but also in Chin, Kachin, and Mon states, with various PDFs emerging, such as the Southern Brothers Army in Tanintharyi Region. As a result, the SAC's control dwindled to a corridor from Mandalay to Yangon, while EAOs and PDFs expanded their influence over seven states and parts of others. (Hmung, 2021)

In response, in January 2024, the *Junta's* National Defence and Security Council extended the state of emergency for another six months, further delaying the promised elections. (ILO, 2022) February 2024 marked three years since the Tatmadaw seized power. However, these battlefield setbacks have raised speculation about the *Junta's* stability, with observations suggesting it is "mortally wounded". (Davis, 2023) The question is, will Tatmadaw in Myanmar collapse in the near future and will Myanmar be governed by the PDF and EAOs and/or a coalition of both these forces? The answer to the question lies in the multidimensional factors like the institutional capacity of the Tatmadaw, the internal divisions within the EAOs and PDF, the organisational capacity of the PDF and EAOs and finally, the support the Tatmadaw may gain from various international collaborators, particularly from China and Russia. The Tatmadaw's resilience, coupled with internal divisions among rebel groups, casts uncertainty on the regime's collapse. The Tatmadaw's ability to adapt and the fragmented nature of the opposition pose significant challenges to the prospect of a post-*junta* Myanmar governed by a unified coalition of rebel groups. (Lee, 2024)

2.2. Political Buddhism and Myanmar's Recent Turmoil:

Buddhism and the Buddhist monks have always played a pivotal role in Myanmar's religious, social and political lives. Historically, the monks have been active in political movements, advocating for democracy, human rights, social justice and Buddhist teachings and values. However, their involvement has varied over time and has been influenced by factors such as government repression, ideological shifts within the monastic community, and external pressures. (ICG, 2023)

They were at the forefront of resistance against the Tatmadaw's authoritarian rule in Myanmar in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and even 2000s. From the period of Ne Win's socialist one-party rule to the military dictatorship during 1988- 2010, monks participated in pro-democracy rallies, led protests, and resisted government attempts to control them. The 2007 Saffron Revolution is one such instance where thousands of monks protested against the military *Junta*. In the 2010s, however, the perspectives and participation of the monks had witnessed changes and many of them aligned themselves with nationalist movements, such as the 969 Movement and its successor, the Association for the Protection of Race and Religion (MaBaTha).(ICG, 2017) These movements have advocated for the protection of Buddhism and Buddhist values, often promoting anti-Muslim sentiment and xenophobia. MaBaTha movement was subsequently banned by the Sangha Council in Myanmar for its involvement in atrocities and its leader Wirathu was sent behind the bars. However, the MabaTha movement had already gained attraction in political activism, albeit in support of military-backed parties, and they fought against the perceived threats to Buddhist identity. During the short rule of NLD, Daw Aung San

Suu Kyi and her government could not convince all fractions of the monks, and some of them started criticising her while some others remained silent or neutral.

The relationship between Buddhist monks and political parties has been dynamic. While some monks have openly supported political parties, others have remained neutral or critical of government actions. The National League for Democracy (NLD) administration led by Aung San Suu Kyi faced criticism from some monks, despite its efforts to engage with religious communities. The military *Junta's* seizure of power in 2021 further complicated these dynamics, with monks facing reprisals for opposing the coup and navigating tensions between their religious duties and political activism.

Political Buddhism, the Buddhist Sangha and the monks have taken a backseat after the February 2021 coup. Some of the monks participated in the anti-military protests; however, a majority of them decided to either stay silent or voice their support for the military. Overall, the role of Buddhist monks and political Buddhism in Myanmar's recent political turmoil reflects the complexities of religion, politics, and identity in the country. (Banu & Zhang, 2021) While some monks advocate for democracy and human rights, others align themselves with nationalist ideologies or remain neutral to avoid reprisals. Their actions and rhetoric have profound implications for the country's political landscape and societal dynamics. Prominent examples include Sitagu Sayadaw, who travelled to Russia with Min Aung Hlaing in July 2022 for a pagoda dedication ceremony and received military support. Other example is Ashin Chekinda, another participant in the Russia trip, who was later promoted to the acting Rector of the International Theravada Buddhist University in Yangon in 2022. (ICG, 2023) This clearly shows that Buddhist Sangha and monks are facing internal challenges as to whom they should lend their support. Aligning with the military, clearly, gives them political and social benefits while supporting the resistance groups implies reprisal from the military-backed state. Some of the monks have also expressed their displeasure with the violent tactics adopted by the EAOs and the resistance movement in their fights against the military.

3. Impact on the Region

A marked increase in violence around the nation has made the humanitarian situation in Myanmar considerably worse. Essential supplies and goods are in short supply in several areas of Myanmar, and important supply routes and roadways are still blocked. Breakdowns in communication have further separated many communities, making it harder for them to get services and making them more vulnerable to threats to their safety.

As of November 30, 2023, approximately 2,300 refugees were being housed in three Temporary Safety Areas (TSAs) in the Mae Hong Son region of Thailand, according to a report from the Royal Thai Government. On November 16, 2022, a further outbreak of hostilities in Kayah State forced another thousand refugees to arrive in Thailand. Since February 2021, some 57,100 people from Myanmar's northwest have fled to India in search of protection. Approximately

5,500 people are registered with UNHCR in New Delhi. Since late October 2022, there has been an increase in warfare in Myanmar, which has resulted in over 6,000 people fleeing to India. Over 5,000 have reportedly arrived in Mizoram, and about 1,300 have come in Manipur. Humanitarian aid, including food, water, and shelter, has been given right away by district administrations, non-governmental organisations, and community-based groups. NGOs, district governments, and CBOs currently provide health support, food, housing, water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), and core-relief items (CRIs). However, resources remain limited, and additional funding is required to scale up this assistance. (UNHCR, 2023)

4. Responses by ASEAN & India

Myanmar is a part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which explains the latter's geopolitical and institutional interests in Myanmar's occurrences. Officially, ASEAN abandoned its non-interference tenet in response to the crisis. A Five-Point Consensus on Myanmar was formed by ASEAN leaders in April 2021, with a commitment to constructive engagement and an end to violence. After the coup, special envoys were appointed by ASEAN. In 2022, Cambodia took over as ASEAN chair and in March and June of that year, Special Envoy Prak Sokhonn paid visits to Myanmar. Sokhonn's visits created a space for communication even though only a little progress was accomplished. Teams from Cambodia were also sent for aid efforts. Despite efforts, the military's inclusion in some ASEAN events raises doubts about collective pressure. ASEAN's split on a UN resolution for an arms embargo in July 2021 highlighted internal divisions.

As the ASEAN Chair in 2023, Indonesia played a crucial role. Indonesia underlined that ASEAN must address the Myanmar issue. However, there are obstacles because of ASEAN's internal divide. Some ASEAN nations emphasise non-interference and are reluctant to become involved. Former Attorney General of Indonesia Marzuki Darusman highlighted ASEAN's unique plea for outside cooperation in November 2022 when she said that outside influence may be necessary for reform in Myanmar. As the ASEAN Chair in 2023, Indonesia forbade military representatives from Myanmar to attend summits. But it did permit the defence attaché from Myanmar to participate in non-combatative drills, casting doubt on ASEAN's combined influence over Myanmar.

Although there were clear internal differences, the July 2023 ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting produced a consensus communiqué endorsing the Five-Point Consensus. ASEAN leaders denounced violence, called for de-escalation, and emphasised the importance of ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus during the 43rd ASEAN Summit in September 2023. The military of Myanmar dismissed the statements as biased. Leaders of ASEAN established a troika—Indonesia, Laos, and Malaysia—to take the lead on the Myanmar issue and refused Myanmar its turn in the 2026 rotating presidency.

Besides Cambodia and Indonesia, it is also essential to note the responses of other ASEAN members towards Myanmar to understand the internal divisions within ASEAN. Malaysia has been a vocal supporter of democracy and has strongly denounced the military coup in Myanmar. ASEAN states should put pressure on Myanmar's military to stop the "atrocities" against its people, according to Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim. Malaysia, the first ASEAN nation to do so, declined to back the elections that the Myanmar military had scheduled for 2023. The first ASEAN minister to meet in public with a representative of the National Unity Government (NUG) was Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Abdullah, who suggested an informal ASEAN-NUG dialogue on humanitarian aid at the beginning of 2023. (Vasisht, 2023)

Singapore has adopted a principled stance against the military's use of fatal force against unarmed citizens, even while preserving economic relations. In response to a parliamentary question, Foreign Affairs Minister Vivian Balakrishnan explained that \$5.8 billion in bilateral trade was generated between Singapore and Myanmar in 2022. Singapore has limited the shipment of weapons to the military but has not placed a comprehensive trade ban on Myanmar. Balakrishnan mentioned that the Financial Action Task Force's blacklisting of Myanmar meant that consumers with ties to the nation were subject to increased vigilance. (MOFA Singapore, 2023)

Thailand and Myanmar share a 2,400 km land border. All ASEAN foreign ministers, including Myanmar's, were invited to an informal meeting Thailand hosted in June 2023 to discuss the peace process in Myanmar. Notably, officials from Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore were not sent. A consultative meeting between military personnel from Myanmar and some ASEAN members—excluding Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines—was held in Thailand in December 2022. Outside of the ASEAN framework, Thailand had these consultative talks with military representatives from Myanmar, and the discussions revealed a lack of agreement. Despite diplomatic efforts, ongoing attacks have strained relations. Instances of Myanmar military and bordering Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) intruding into Thai airspace in July 2023 led to tensions. The Royal Thai Air Force responded by patrolling the border district with F-16 fighter jets. Despite the crisis, Thailand has refused to accept refugees, and temporary safe zones remain closed. The new Thai Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, faces the challenge of navigating Thailand's approach to Myanmar amid ASEAN divisions. (Muhammad & Sahide, 2022) In January 2024, Thailand took another welcome step known as the "humanitarian corridor", endorsed by ASEAN, to deliver and supply humanitarian aid to war-torn Myanmar. Myanmar Red Cross takes the aid shipment from Thailand to the victims and needy inside Myanmar. However, questions have been raised by other agencies including former ASEAN officials regarding the credibility of this programme as the officials of Myanmar Red Cross are handpicked by the Myanmar government. (VOA, 2024)

Statements released after the most recent ASEAN summits reiterate the organisation's dedication to using the Five-Point Consensus (FPC) as the primary framework for resolving the political

unrest in Myanmar. These declarations stress the necessity of inclusive communication within Myanmar while disapproving of violence and airstrikes.

The ASEAN's stance on Myanmar is still nuanced; some countries remain engaged with Myanmar's military, while others advocate for the return of democracy. The troika arrangement is a step in the right direction, but the Myanmar situation is more challenging to resolve while ASEAN is divided. With Laos leading ASEAN in 2024, it is acknowledged that a comprehensive outlook would be required to address the present crises in Myanmar. (Harding & Tower, 2023)

As far as India is concerned, political, strategic and security considerations play pivotal roles in defining India's policy towards Myanmar. Time and again, the leaders of India have maintained that India needs to have cordial and neighbourly relations with Myanmar, irrespective of the latter's governments. (Min, 2022) Multiple ethnic insurgent groups from Northeast India have their bases in Myanmar, and the ethnic rebels from Myanmar, too, have found safe havens in Northeast India several times. The issues of cross-border insurgency, illegal movement of people and trafficking of arms and narcotics have forced the Government of India to maintain a cordial partnership with the Myanmar government to secure their cooperation in the anti-insurgency operations. Moreover, an unstable Myanmar means an added burden of refugees, illegal migration across the borders and infiltration of other associated problems. Therefore, the Indian government has taken the approach of avoiding confrontations with the Myanmar military and working towards the betterment of the living standards of the people of Myanmar. (Marjani, 2023) Besides insurgency and trafficking, infrastructure development in Northeast India is another challenge for India. According to reports, between 2014-15 and 2022-23, the Government of India spent Rs. 3.84 lakh crore on building infrastructure in Northeast India. (Mondal, 2023) A boon to infrastructure in the Northeastern part of India would mean more comprehensive transport and connectivity with Southeast Asia, a possible extension of the Trilateral Highway, better trade and investment in the seven sisters and overall development of the states. Such geopolitical considerations explain External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar's meeting with Myanmar representative at the MGC Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Thailand in July 2023 and India's cautious approach towards Myanmar. (Sreelakshmi B., 2023) In view of the illegal movement of people across the border between India and Myanmar, in February 2024, however, the Government of India decided to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and fence the border. FMR was implemented to facilitate free cross-border movement of people for business, healthcare and other services for 16 km on both sides. Scraping FMR implied restrictions on the free flow of movement across the border indicating India's strong stand for its national security and stability in the Northeastern part of India. (Lama, 2024) In April 2024, India also decided to shift its Consulate staff from Sittwe, following clashes between the EAOs, PDFs and the Junta in Myawaddy, a town on the Thai-Myanmar border, close to Thailand's Mae Sot. Myawaddy is one of the key trade points of Myanmar which fell to the EAOs and PDFs followed by the clash with the Junta. (Basu, 2024) The other Indian Consulate in Myanmar is located in Mandalay.

5. Role of the International Actors

The first significant international actor in the case of human rights violations and political violence in Myanmar is the United Nations. The UN and the international community have taken several actions to address the human rights violations in Myanmar. (Selth, 2018) The United Nations High Commissioner of Human Rights consistently called out the human rights violations in Myanmar and inspired the staff serving in the field to address the abuses.

Reiterating its assessment that crimes against humanity are a regular occurrence in Myanmar, the UN-backed Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) reported in July 2022 that it had collected and examined evidence to support its case files for the criminal prosecution of those accountable for significant crimes. In response, more sanctions were placed on people and organisations connected to the Junta by the US, UK, Canada, and the EU. Companies such as Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE) under the control of the *Junta* were targeted by the US and its allies. (IIMM, 2023)

The French business Total Energies has also left Myanmar, giving up its position in the oil and gas fields. The surviving partners, MOGE, US-based Chevron, and Thai-based PTTEP, benefited from this departure by receiving a larger interest, with PTTEP assuming the operatorship. Several other significant businesses, such as ENEOS, Woodside, Mitsubishi, Chevron, and Petronas, also intended to reduce their presence in Myanmar. Telenor (a telecom business based in Norway) also left Myanmar, while Ooredoo (a telecom company located in Qatar) announced that it was selling its operations in Myanmar. Due to the worsening political and humanitarian conditions, these withdrawals were part of a larger pattern of international businesses pulling out of Myanmar. (HRW, 2023)

The European Parliament adopted two resolutions to condemn ongoing abuses by the *Junta*, urging the European Union to take more robust actions. It recognised the opposition National Unity Government (NUG), Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH), and National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) as the sole legitimate representatives of the democratic aspirations of the Myanmar people. This underscores international efforts to hold the *Junta* accountable and support democratic alternatives in Myanmar.

In 2023, former US Congressman Thomas Andrews assumed the duty of the UN Special Rapporteur on the state of human rights in Myanmar. He has urged UN members to act quickly to stop the influx of weaponry into Myanmar. To prevent the military *Junta* from perpetrating crimes against humanity and war crimes, he called for international intervention. Humanitarian issues and mass displacement are the results of the escalating army war in Myanmar. He demanded action to stop *Junta* jets and helicopter gunships from targeting residential areas, including denying the *Junta* fuel for jet engines. (UN, 2023)

Mr Andrews underlined the necessity of swift international action to stop additional fatalities and breaches of human rights. Thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the military *Junta's* indiscriminate airstrikes on villages in response to territorial losses. The Special Rapporteur stressed the protection of civilians and the humane treatment of prisoners of war in his call for all parties to the conflict to abide by international humanitarian law. Mr. Andrews also emphasised the significance of assisting displaced and vulnerable populations with humanitarian aid. To prepare the ground for a democratic and rights-abiding nation, he advocated for aggressive interaction with the National Unity Government, ethnic resistance groups, and civil society in Myanmar. (Relief Web, 2023)

A special focus should be given to Myanmar's recent relationships with Russia and China, both holding prominent roles in the *Junta's* foreign policy. While China remains Myanmar's largest source of trade and investment, relations between Myanmar's Junta and China have experienced strains post-coup. Myanmar's SAC head, Min Aung Hlaing, has not visited China or met with senior Chinese leaders since seizing power, indicating a cooling of relations. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's decision not to visit Naypyidaw during a Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Forum foreign ministers' meeting in July 2022 further underscored the strained relations. Subsequently, in October 2023, China decided not to invite Min Aung Hlaing to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Summit in Beijing, which indicated a degree of disengagement and displeasure with Myanmar's Junta. This displeasure comes from China's alleged involvement with some of the EAOs within Myanmar and civil war in the China-Myanmar bordering states, particularly in Shan State, causing disruption of trade between China and Myanmar.(Storey, 2023)

On the other hand, Myanmar and Russia have significantly strengthened their diplomatic, political, and military ties post-coup. This tightening of relations has been primarily driven by mutual interests, particularly in military cooperation and arms sales. Russia has emerged as a key supporter of Myanmar's military *Junta* (State Administration Council, SAC) following the coup. The SAC Chairman, Min Aung Hlaing, has made multiple visits to Russia, emphasising the importance of the relationship. Russia has provided substantial military assistance to Myanmar, including arms sales and training. This support has increased Russia's influence in Myanmar's military affairs. Since the coup, Russia has moved China to become the largest provider of military assistance to Myanmar. According to the Swedish think tank SIPRI, between 2021 and 2022, Russia provided Myanmar with US\$276 million in military supplies, compared to US\$156 million from China. (The Star, 2024)

In reciprocity, Myanmar's SAC endorsed Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, demonstrating solidarity with Moscow and distinguishing itself as the only ASEAN member state to do so. Myanmar supported Russia's stand on Ukraine as invaders against Russia. Surprisingly, Myanmar and Russia even co-chaired an ADMM Plus working group meeting on anti-terrorism leading to many ASEAN dialogue partners boycotting the same. Cooperation between Myanmar

and Russia extends beyond military matters to include economic cooperation, such as energy and trade partnerships.

Russia might facilitate Myanmar's involvement in multilateral forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS, providing alternatives to ASEAN and potential avenues for economic cooperation. In fact, Myanmar was given dialogue partner status in SCO in May 2023, and Myanmar is expected to apply for BRICS membership formally in 2024. Russia-Myanmar partnership has recently seen developments such as MoU between Sputnik, Russia's state-owned news agency and Myanmar's The Global New Light of Myanmar, a state mouthpiece in Myanmar. The election bodies of both Russia and Myanmar too have signed MoUs to facilitate Myanmar's next elections, which were considered a sham by many countries in the West.

6. Recommendations and Conclusion

Diplomacy Remains a Key Point: Myanmar has ensured various problems since its independence in 1948. The country has been under military rule since 1962 with a small pause between 2011 and 2020. The military has been harsh on its people on various occasions including the uprising on 8/8/88, the Saffron Revolution in 2007 and the post-coup uprising since February 2021. (Maizland, 2022) The country has also witnessed a long-lasting civil warfare, refugee crises and internal displacement. Several countries have imposed partial sanctions and individual sanctions on Myanmar and its generals; however, those financial restrictions have not been fruitful in bringing the Junta to the discussion table. ASEAN, on the other hand, has always adopted a constructive engagement policy towards Myanmar and has not closed the door to the *Junta* of Myanmar. (Passeri &Marston, 2022) The recent history also shows that ASEAN has been divisive in taking a harsh step against Myanmar, and rather, it explores diplomatic avenues to engage the generals. ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus and Troika strategy, as noted in the paper, seem to be a slow process; however, diplomacy is considered to be an effective tool to convince the military for any negotiations and discussions on the security situation in Myanmar.

Humanitarian Aid: Myanmar desperately needs humanitarian aid. According to reports published by OHCHR, 1.5 million people have been internally displaced, over 60,000 civilian infrastructures have been destroyed and one-third of the country's total population requires humanitarian assistance and aid. (OHCHR, 2023) This data, along with the data and information presented in the paper, demonstrate that the people of Myanmar need access to healthcare, emergency medical care, food, shelter and other basic necessities. Overall, ASEAN, Troika, India and other international actors need to strengthen collaborative efforts to provide urgent humanitarian assistance to the affected people of Myanmar.

Promoting Good Governance: Once the military comes to the discussion table, the regional leaders and international actors need to promote good governance to encourage inclusivity, justice and accountability. It will signify a free and fair election to elect the next government,

encouraging transparent administration and justice systems and include the ones who felt isolated, marginalised and deceived in the past few years.

Economic Development: Myanmar's economy has faced multiple challenges in the recent times. The revival of the country and its stability would depend on its economic development. Currently, the country faces poverty, a lack of infrastructure, a lack of human capital development, a lack of foreign direct investment and a lack of financial inclusion. These problems would require long-term vision, planning and implementation to give way to development and economic stability. Good governance and political stability will yield economic development in the long run.

Education and Reconciliation: Finally, education and reconciliation have a great role to play in peace restoration in Myanmar. While it is important to promote tolerance and understanding through a reconciliatory approach, simultaneously, education is also important to encourage civil society to work for harmony in civic and peace education. While combined together in a holistic manner, education and reconciliation help in building peace and broker negotiations. (UNHCR, 2015)

This working paper attempted to understand the security landscape of Myanmar in the post-February 2021 coup time and unfold various dimensions associated with it. It also argues that the silver lining between traditional and non-traditional security concerns is blurred in Myanmar as state-sponsored violent attacks and clashes are resulting in violation of human rights and non-traditional security challenges. It also argues that regional actors like ASEAN and India have been feeling the repercussions of the political violence in Myanmar, and therefore, it is imperative for them to shy away from the non-interference model and adopt a vociferous constructive engagement approach towards Myanmar. ASEAN's decision for the Troika and Humanitarian Corridor approach to deal with the security situation in Myanmar is a welcome step towards this direction. Finally, the working paper also identifies the role of the international actors and recommends a few ways to manage the crises in Myanmar. It recommends diplomatic channels for discussions, promotion of good governance, reconciliation and education and access to humanitarian aid for immediate relief to the common people of Myanmar.

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