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Burma's Transition to "Disciplined Democracy": Abdication or Institutionalization of Military Rule?

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Abstract

Direct military rule has become rare in world politics. Today, most military regimes have either given way to some form of democracy or been transformed into another form of authoritarianism. This article formulates an analytical framework for the detachment of militaries from politics and identifies positive and negative factors for a withdrawal. It then applies this framework to the case of Burma/Myanmar, which is an example of deeply entrenched military rule. It is argued that the retreat from direct rule has brought with it a further institutionalization of military rule in politics, since the military was able to safeguard its interests and design the new electoral authoritarian regime according to its own purposes. The article identifies the internal dynamics within the military regime as a prime motive for a reform of the military regime. Although the external environment has completely changed over the last two decades, this had only a minor impact on military politics. The opposition could not profit from the regime's factionalization and external sanctions and pressure have been undermined by Asian engagement.

Keywords: military regime, civilian control, external influences, internal influences, competitive authoritarianism, Burma/Myanmar

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Burma's Transition to "Disciplined Democracy": Abdication or Institutionalization of Military Rule?

Marco Bünte

Article Outline

1 Introduction

Direct military rule has become rare in world politics. In March 2011 the Burmese military regime dissolved the ruling junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), and handed over power to a newly elected civilian government. Due to these circumstances, Burma can no longer be classified as a case of direct military rule. This process illustrates a gradual decline of military regimes worldwide in the last two decades. This phenomenon has been especially virulent in Asia, where in 1987 half of the continent's countries still lived under military or military-backed rule. Since then, democracy has replaced many military or

quasi-military regimes in Bangladesh, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand and Pakistan.[1] This, however, is by no means a linear process, as the military coups in Pakistan 1999 and in Thailand 2006 demonstrated. Moreover, recent studies have also shown that in many newly democratized nations the military enjoys considerable political prerogatives and a great deal of institutional autonomy (Alagappa 2001; Beeson/Bellamy 2006; Croissant et al. 2011a). Why do militaries withdraw from power? How can we assess the military's role in a "civilian state"? Does the military still wield power behind the scenes, making direct rule unnecessary?

This paper adds to the literature on civil military relations in several ways: First, it constructs a concept of military participation in politics that goes beyond the recent emphasis on coup politics. Traditionally, the detachment of military from politics and the establishment of civilian control has been defined as the lack of military coups and military rule (Nordlinger 1977). In contrast to this dichotomous perspective, I use a gradual concept of military involvement whose polar opposites are civilian supremacy/civilian control on one side and military control/military rule on the other. Second, I construct a framework that discusses various positive and negative factors for a detachment of the military from politics. This framework succeeds in overcoming the traditional limitations of the dominance of either internal or external factors found in the literature on civil–military relations. Third, this paper brings attention to the outlier Burma/Myanmar,[2] which is an example of extreme persistence of military rule and thus contradicts the overall diagnosis of extreme instability of military regimes found in the general literature on authoritarian regimes (Geddes 1999; Hadenius/Teorell 2007).

Burma is generally regarded as the most durable military regime worldwide. Soon after independence from Great Britain in 1948, the military became the most powerful institution in the country with a huge impact on society and the economy. Confronted with a number of countrywide insurgencies after the departure of the British, the military initiated a rapid modernization of the armed forces that by far overtook the institutional development of the Burmese state. The consequence was a "military aggrandizement of resources, responsibilities and powers in traditional non-military realms" (Callahan 2003: 18).

After General Ne Win's coup against the civilian government of U Nu in 1962, the country has oscillated between direct and indirect forms of military rule. General Ne Win and his

1 Quasi-military regimes are military regimes with a civilian façade (such as a constitution, civilian president, semi-competitive elections). These regimes, however, are military in substance, since the military holds a political hegemony (Finer 1962).

2 The military regime changed the name of the country in July 1989 from Burma to Myanmar. At the same time, a number of other titles and places were changed in an attempt to remove any traces of the colonial era. In the subsequent years, the new name was accepted by the UN and other states and institutions. A number of countries and pro-democracy groups have, however, refused to acknowledge the new name as a protest against the human rights abuses of the military and its refusal to hand over power to an elected civilian government. Throughout this paper, "Burma" is employed in preference to "Myanmar", though this is highly contested terrain. The name "Burma" is less obviously associated with the dominant ethnic group. For more on these issues see Dittmer (2008).

Revolutionary Council ruled Burma directly until 1974, when the country was transformed into a military-backed, socialist one-party state under the leadership of Ne Win's Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). The "Burmese Way to Socialism", however, led to a severe economic crisis at the end of the 1980s. Confronted with massive pro-democracy demonstrations in the wake of the economic crisis, Ne Win decided to resign in July 1988. The military, however, managed to reconsolidate its power, after it cracked down on pro-democracy demonstrations in August 1988, killing several thousand protestors. The coup by the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) on 18 August 1988 re-established direct military rule, which continued for over 21 years until 30 March 2011, when the military dissolved the ruling body, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC, the SLORC's successor), and handed over power to the newly elected President Thein Sein.

Military rule in Burma has been especially contested over the last two decades: After the military promised to hand over power to an elected government in 1988, it did not acknowledge the results of the elections in May 1990, which ended in a landslide victory for the oppositional National League for Democracy (NLD). Acting in the manner of a caretaker government, the military argued that the country lacked a constitution for transferring power to a new government. What followed was a decade of confrontations – on one side between the military, the NLD and the ethnic groups, and on the other side between the military and the Western countries, which supported the opposition's call for an acknowledgment of the results of the 1990s elections. Finally, in September 2003, the military announced its roadmap to "disciplined democracy", which promised to transfer power to an elected government again. After the military managed to write a new constitution and to hold multiparty elections, in which the playing field was heavily tilted toward the military-dominated party, it handed over power to the new civilian government in March 2011.

In the following section, I give a definition of military regimes and discuss the various ways militaries can be involved in politics. I then go on to formulate a framework for discussing various preconditions and reasons for militaries to disengage from politics. Then I elucidate the evolution and state of military involvement in politics in Burma from 1948 till 2011 and discuss reasons for the military's withdrawal from direct rule. In the last section, I offer some conclusions based on the case of Burma.

2 Military Regimes and Military Intervention in Politics

Military regimes, which can be defined as a "system of government by the military" (Perlmutter 1980: 96), are a special form of authoritarian rule. As such, they have to be distinguished from both democracies and other forms of authoritarian rule. Following Dahl's concept of polyarchy, scholars have adopted a "procedural minimum" definition of democracy that includes four key attributes: free, fair and competitive elections, full adult suffrage, broad protection of civil liberties (freedom of speech, press and association) and the absence of non-elected "tute-

lary authorities" that limit the governing power of elected officials (Dahl 1971; Diamond 1999: 7–15).[3] If militaries wield these "tutelary powers" or "reserved domains" but still accept the democratic game, a "tutelary democracy" evolves (Collier/Levitsky 1997; Merkel 2004). In these "democracies with adjectives" (Collier/Levitsky 1997), the problem of military involvement in politics and the establishment of "civilian control"[4] become some of the main challenges of democratic consolidation, since liberal democracies require the civilian control of the armed forces as a necessary condition (Croissant et al. 2011b).

At the other end of the political spectrum, we find *closed* authoritarian regimes, in which no channels exist for oppositional forces to legally contest for executive power (Levitsky/Way 2010: 7; Snyder 2006). This type includes two subcategories: closed regimes, in which we find no democratic institutions, and hegemonic regimes, in which formal democratic institutions exist on paper but are nothing more than a façade (Schedler 2002). Military regimes, in which "military officers are major or predominant political actors by virtue of their actual or threatened use of force" (Nordlinger 1977: 2), may fall into either category. We can distinguish between direct military regimes, in which the military forms the government, and quasi-civilian regimes, which are military regimes with a civilian window dressing (civilian president, constitution, semi-competitive elections). The latter are military regimes in substance in the sense that the military holds political hegemony (Finer 1962). Moreover, the armed forces may also be part of the regime coalition in other forms of closed authoritarian regimes such as monarchies, Sultanistic regimes (e.g. the Philippines under Ferdinand Marcos 1972–1986) and single-party regimes (North Korea). These different forms of regimes can frequently not be categorized accurately, although they "draw on different groups to staff government offices and different segments of society for support. They have different procedures for making decisions, different ways of handling their choice of leaders and succession, and different ways of responding to society and opponents" (Geddes 1999: 121). Moreover, there are often amalgams or hybrids of these diverse regime types.

In general, military regimes are considered the weakest form of authoritarianism. According to Barbara Geddes, who analysed the stability of 163 authoritarian regimes from 1945–1998, military regimes have an average lifespan of only seven years, while single-party regimes have an average lifespan of 35 years (Geddes 1999: 121). Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s military regimes were the most common form of authoritarian government, they have increasingly been transformed into "limited multiparty systems" since then (Hadenius/Teorell 2007: 152). Despite these developments, the military often wields enormous influence behind the scenes of these regimes. The problem of "civil–military relations" and "civilian con-

3 Other scholars, such as Przeworski, employ a more minimalist definition that centres on contested elections (Przeworski et al. 2000).

4 In civilian regimes, the armed forces are under the supremacy of the civilian government. In a democratic state, civilian control means that civilian authorities are responsible for making political decisions, and the military is responsible for implementing them.

trol" of the military has often been the focus of studies in post-authoritarian contexts, as civilian control has often been considered a necessary condition for democratic rule. For liberal democracies to persist, the armed forces must be subordinate to democratically elected civilian authorities (Diamond 1999; Croissant et al. 2011b).

Earlier research on military rule has worked out various subtypes that draw on the social foundations of military rule, its class background and its role in economic development: The most important forms have been market-bureaucratic regimes, monarchic military regimes, single party (often socialist) military regimes, and oligarchic military regimes (Janowitz 1964; Huntington 1968; O'Donnell 1973; Perlmutter 1980; Remmer 1989). With the growing extinction of direct military regimes from the political scene, these concepts fall short of delineating the extent of military power in politics. According to Nordlinger, there are two factors that define the level of military intervention: the extent of power of the armed forces and their political and economic goals (Nordlinger 1977: 22). Nordlinger distinguishes three ideal types of military rule: rulers, guardians and moderators. As rulers, militaries dominate the regime and attempt to control large segments of society and the economy. They "intend to bring basic changes in the distribution of power by eliminating all existing power centres" (Nordlinger 1977: 22). In both other regime types, militaries aim to preserve the status quo. Guardians control the government from backstage; they have not taken over the government by themselves but control the government informally. Moderators leave the most important positions in the government to civilians, but the military maintains veto power over certain policies (Nordlinger 1977: 22). The problem with Nordlinger's theory is that some hidden forms of military rule cannot be separated clearly from civilian autocracies. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the exact relationship between civilian and military authorities in these regimes.

Finer distinguishes three modes of military intervention in civil politics (Finer 1962): blackmailing, displacement and supplantment. First, the military pressures or blackmails civilian authorities. The military intervenes in decision-making by threatening to withdraw its support for the regime coalition or by supporting groups that agitate against the government. Second, the military attempts to displace members of the cabinet. The third mode of intervention is supplantment: either the military or factions within the military support rebel groups fighting against the government or threaten to stage a military coup. The problem with both Finer's and Nordlinger's theories is that they do not give exact criteria for delineating military intervention into politics.

Recent innovative approaches have proposed conceptualizing military intervention in politics along a spectrum of military influence, military participation and military control of government (Welch/Smith 1974; Siaroff 2009; Croissant et al. 2011b). Siaroff designed a continuum for measuring the degree of military intervention into the political and civilian affairs of the state. He accounted for eleven indicators that are used to categorize the military's intervention. Siaroff envisions a continuum of civil–military relations that ranges from "civilian su-

premacy" and "civilian control",[5] across the middle categories of conditional subordination and military tutelage to military control and military rule. He uses several criteria such as influence on policy-making in certain fields, representation in government, right to intervention, accountability for past human rights violations and autonomy over resources and processes.[6]

Figure 1: Degree of Military Intervention

Regime Type	Liberal Democracy		Electoral Democracy		Autocracy	
Degree of military intervention	Civilian supremacy	Civilian control	Conditional subordination	Military tutelage	Military control	Military rule

Siaroff 2009: 90.

However, as Croissant et al. rightly argue, civilian control also exists in autocracies. Consequently, we see that regime type is not a good predictor of the type of civil–military relations (Croissant et al. 2011a: 194). Military officers play a decisive role in all regimes, since they are either part of the ruling coalition or heavily influence policy decisions in certain fields. Most of these regimes also depend on the military for their very survival. In some cases, they act as veto actors. Regime transitions within authoritarian regimes thus often lead to a different role for the military – it is shifted away "from the driver's seat" to a more backseat role (Finer 1985: 18). It is, therefore, always necessary to contextualize the military's role in politics, along with its reasons for intervention, instruments and scope of power (Snyder 2006: 220). It is also necessary to delineate conditions for a withdrawal of the military from politics, i.e. a change in the degree of military intervention. In order to do this, it is necessary to identify factors that explain the motives for military interventions.

3 Conducive and Unfavourable Conditions for Military Withdrawal

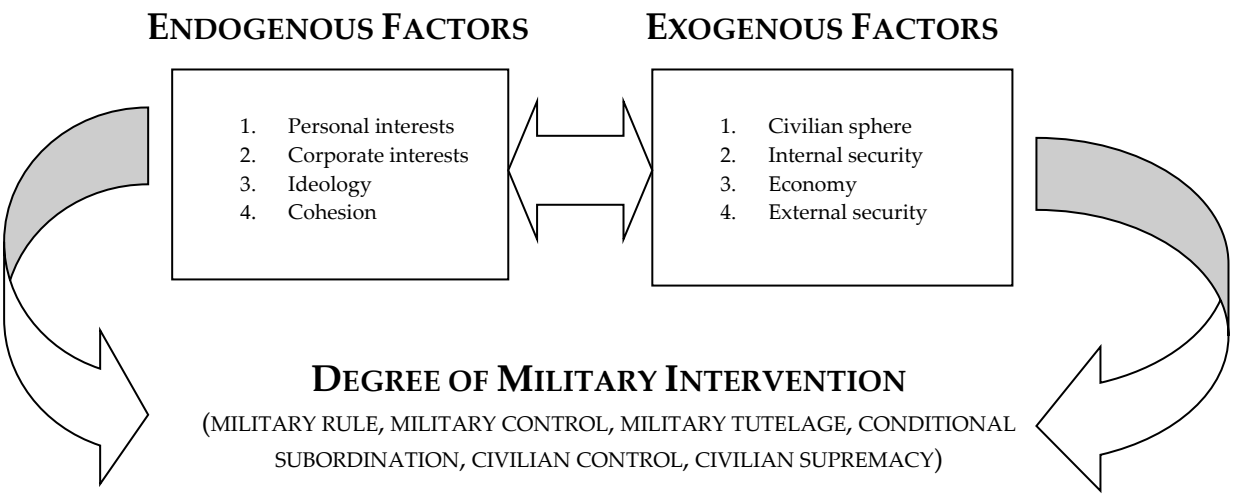
In general, two theoretical schools can be identified within the research on civil–military relations (Kennedy/Louscher 1991; Nordlinger 1977: 1; Sundhaussen 1985; Croissant 2004). The first relies on internal military variables to explain various degrees of military intervention; the second points to external factors. However, neither approach is all-encompassing (Sundhaussen 1985: 272; Croissant 2004). Sundhaussen, who attempts to explore factors that facilitate a withdrawal of militaries from office, suggests combining these different theorems. According to Sundhaussen, the degree of military intervention into politics is the outcome of several mutually interdependent endogenous and extraneous factors. Departing from Finer's

5 In contrast to the first category, civilians lack expertise in military affairs, do not hold the military to account for past human rights violations, and cannot control its internal affairs.

6 Siaroff's classification is based on a set of eleven indicators that are measured on a scale of 1 to 10. The higher the numerical score, the more comprehensive the civilian control.

distinction of the military's disposition to intervene and their social opportunity structures ("mood" vs. "motive"), Sundhaussen argues that a withdrawal from politics is the outcome of two interdependent concurrent factors: the dynamics within the internal organization of the military itself and the political, cultural, economic and international environment that influence the military's actions (Sundhaussen 1985: 271). The strategic options of the armed forces are therefore shaped by two structuralist factors: a) endogenous factors, which shape the disposition and ability of the military to intervene into or withdraw from politics and b) extraneous factors, which form conducive or unfavourable opportunity structures for the military's intervention or withdrawal. Examples of extraneous factors include the inability of civilian governments to control political violence and attempts of political groups to draw the military into the political arena. Croissant argues that these two factors act as "pull factors" for the military by pulling the armed forces into the terrain of civil politics, while endogenous factors operate as "push factors" by affecting the cohesion, coherence, internal resources, moods and organizational motives of military action (Croissant 2004: 360). Military regimes disengage from politics if the military's cohesion is threatened by ideological polarization or if increased factionalism endangers the unity of the armed forces (Nordlinger 1977: 144; Huntington 1968: 252–260; Finer 1962: 173–186): The withdrawal of the military from the political arena depends on the interplay of both endogenous and exogenous factors. These two sets of variables can be further broken down into eight variables: 1. personal interests of the military; 2. corporate interests of the military; 3. military ideology; 4. military cohesion; 5. configuration of the civilian sphere (strength of parties and civil society); 6. economic development; 7. internal security (e.g. secessionist movements); and 8. external security (Albright 1980: 575; Finer 1962; Sundhaussen 1985; Croissant 2004).

Figure 2: Determinants of Military Interventions



3.1 Endogenous Factors

A retreat of the military from political power is facilitated by the belief that civilian governments will take into account the personal and corporate interests of the military. Leading military officers might fear being persecuted under the new regime and being held responsible for past human rights violations. Consequently, they may be reluctant to leave office. The military might also have some corporate interests: It might demand sufficient budget allocations from the (civilian) government to acquire adequate equipment and armaments and to pay satisfactory salaries and wages. When a government fails to care for the interests of the military, officers will be more inclined to intervene. Moreover, certain factions or influential leaders within the military might have economic interests in legal or illegal businesses such as drug trafficking or the arms trade. The armed forces therefore might attempt to safeguard these interests from civilian influence. The enforcement of civilian control is hampered when the military is engaged in entrepreneurial roles, as the civilian government might refrain from implementing policies that run counter to the interests of the military. Since the military is capable of supplanting the government, it is a far more dangerous political actor than other political groups. In post-authoritarian governments, the military often has institutional prerogatives, such as legislative seats or a high degree of representation in cabinets to lobby certain political groups to shield its corporate interests. Additionally, the military often has the ability to lobby certain criminal elements in order to stimulate unrest and to create a situation that might facilitate a return of the military into politics.

Moreover, the ideological orientation of the military is an important factor. An ideologically coherent military that does not follow Huntington's ideal of a non-political, "professional" military (Huntington 1957)[7] but has instead expanded its role to a "new professionalism" (Stepan 1976) is far less willing to withdraw from politics. These soldiers believe that regular political interventions are their moral duty as they often identify themselves with the national interest. On the other hand, a "democratic professionalism" of the armed forces (Fitch 1998) may facilitate the subordination to civilian authorities, since the armed forces accept the supremacy of the civilian government and the constitutional order. Additionally, military factionalism can influence the military's decision to withdraw from politics. The decision to return to the barracks must be agreed upon by all military factions. An increased factionalism – which means the division of the armed forces along class interests or ethnic and/or religious loyalties – increases the likelihood of counter-coups and civil war in situations in which power is fragmented and dispersed.

7 Huntington argued for what he called "objective civilian control", focusing on a politically neutral, autonomous, professional officer corps. This autonomous professionalism is based on a special esprit de corps and sense of distinct military corporateness, which prevents officers from interfering in politics (Huntington 1957).

3.2 Exogenous Factors

It is often argued that military interventions in politics take place merely when the civilian government proves unable to govern the country effectively, when they are unable to solve internal conflicts and manage security threats peacefully. Intense political polarization and the lack of mature political institutions to solve political conflicts therefore have been the most important preconditions for the return of the military into the political arena. However, this hypothesis implies the existence of civilian governments. In cases where the military has ruled a country for decades, such civilian structures are often weak or non-existent. Strong civil societies based on social movements, political parties or middle classes seem to be more important to force the military out of power. In similar contexts, students often act as a vanguard to force the military out of office.

Additionally, it is important for these different groups to form a consensus on common goals and future directions in order to negotiate the military's retreat from power. In this context, it is important to offer the military certain incentives that draw them to their side. Moreover, attacks by guerrillas or secessionist movements might give the army the pretext to stay in power or pull the armed forces back into domestic politics. The opportunity structure for military intervention is favourable in situations where there is no consensus about the rule of the political game, where there is considerable uncertainty about the future of the state or where there are external threats to national security. However, an environment conducive to military disengagement prevails if the civilian government enjoys broad legitimacy due to its social and economic policies, as long as there is a general consensus on the rules of the political game and the role of the military therein. It must be emphasized that the prevalence of these points is not the same in all countries. They affect the dynamics in various regimes at different points in time and in various ways. However, it is the interplay of these internal and external factors that leads to the withdrawal of the military.

4 The Military in Burmese Politics 1948–2010

The Burmese military (Tatmadaw) has been deeply involved in politics since the country's independence from Great Britain in 1948. As its formation in 1942 preceded the existence of an independent state and the officer corps was politicized as a liberating force during the struggle for national independence, the army could retrospectively assume the role of guardian of the Burmese state and bulwark of national independence. Although the 1947 Constitution established a democratic system of government and the military accepted civilian supremacy, the army was able to gradually expand its political role (Taylor 1985; Callahan 2001; Callahan 2003). Both external and internal factors explain the increasing assertiveness

of the Burmese military: the outbreak of ethnic and communist rebellions[8] after the departure of the British triggered the institutional modernization of the armed forces, which did not keep pace with the civilian government capacities of the national state. In the 1950s the military increasingly took over administrative and civilian functions and claimed a substantial part (one-third to one-half) of the national budget for internal security. However, unlike its Thai or Indonesian counterparts, the Burmese army did not develop its own business network at this point in time (Taylor 1985: 28). In 1958, increasing factionalism within the ruling Anti-Fascist Peoples Freedom League (AFPFL) led to a split in the party and a growing instability in the parliamentary system. The officer corps feared that the split could also weaken the army's unity. General Ne Win urged the civilian government of Prime Minister U Nu to temporarily transfer power to the armed forces ("Caretaker Government", 1958–1960). During this period, the officer corps developed a praetorian ethos, which was grounded in the belief that it was more effective than its civilian counterparts. The military adopted a new ideology, which defined the role of the military in broad national security terms as being responsible for the defence of the national objectives of establishing "peace and the rule of law", "democracy" and a "socialist economy" (Myoe 2008: 16–44). This prepared the groundwork for the "new professionalism" of the Burmese military (Than 2001: 165-166): The military also expanded its business activities into the banking sector, construction industry and fishing, and it became the most powerful business organization in the country (Taylor 1985: 32).

Although the "Caretaker Government" handed back power in February 1960, General Ne Win staged a coup in March 1962, which brought army leaders into power and "eliminated their civilian counterparts once and for all" (Callahan 2001: 422). U Nu's decision to make Buddhism the state religion, along with the calls by ethnic groups for greater autonomy and secession from the union prepared the groundwork for the intervention of the military, which stepped in to save the country from disintegration. Since then, the military has prevented the emergence of any autonomous centres of influence. General Ne Win formed a Revolutionary Council, which ruled the country by fiat until 1974. It abolished the 1947 Constitution, dissolved parliament and banned all political parties. The military government nationalized the economy under the banner of the "Burmese Way to Socialism" and cut all ties to the outside world. It set up its own Leninist party, the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), which ran the country unchallenged for over 25 years (Silverstein 1977). Apart from one short outbreak of student demonstrations in 1974,[9] army and party leaders were able to control society. The military became the backbone of the socialist one-party state (1974–1988), in which

8 These rebellions were supported by foreign powers. The Kuomintang rebels (KMT) were supported by the CIA, while the rebellion of the communists was supported by the Chinese.

9 Workers and students in Rangoon protested against inflation and food shortages after the implementation of policies that favoured the rural economy. The military used force and at least 22 people were killed. Universities were closed. In December 1974, students and monks protested at the state's funeral arrangements for former UN Secretary General U Than (Taylor 2010: 36).

General Ne Win was both party chairman and president. Based on his personal influence on the army and the party, he kept his subordinates divided and controlled all potential rivals through regular purges. Active and retired military officers dominated the cabinets and rubber stamp parliaments. In the closing years of the socialist period, the influence of the military waned, since the BSPP was transformed into a socialist mass party – a considerable percentage of the party leadership, however, remained in military hands (Taylor 2010: 318–321).

The military-backed, socialist one-party regime crumbled from within in 1987/88, when the country was facing a severe economic crisis. In 1987 the World Bank had given the country the status of Least Developed Country. Further economic mismanagement led to massive student demonstrations in 1988, which forced General Ne Win to resign as party chairman in July 1988. The protests escalated into a broad-based, countrywide democracy movement that continued until September 1988, when the military reorganized itself, staged a coup and brutally cracked down on the movement, killing thousands of demonstrators (Steinberg 2001: 3–12; Lintner 1990).

The coup of the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) re-established direct military rule on 18 August 1988. The military revoked the 1974 Constitution, dissolved parliament and concentrated executive, legislative and judicial powers in military hands. When seizing power, the junta under the leadership of Saw Maung promised to hand over power after holding fresh multiparty elections. However, the military council failed to acknowledge the results of the May 1990 elections, which ended in a landslide victory for the oppositional NLD.[10] Acting in the manner of a caretaker government, the military argued that the country lacked a constitution for transferring power to a new government. Military rule has been heavily contested since then: The NLD and the ethnic political parties have called for a swift transfer of power and subsequently mobilized the international community to support their demands. As a consequence, the military found itself under heavy criticism from Western states, international NGOs and human rights advocates. The military instead attempted to safeguard its leading role in politics (see below). It tried to draft a new constitution and invited political parties for a National Convention, which started work in 1993 but came to a halt in 1996, when the NLD left the convention because of a lack of debate and undemocratic principles. Lacking electoral legitimacy, the military junta ruled with an iron fist, suppressing all avenues of dissent and controlling society: Members of the opposition – including NLD leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and other leading figures of her party – had to spend long periods under house arrest or had to flee the country due to military persecution. The number of political prisoners has remained high over the last two decades.

After 1990 the military embarked on a massive state-building programme, which has concentrated on modernizing the country's weak infrastructure (construction of roads,

10 The National League for Democracy gained 59.87 per cent of the votes and 81 per cent of the seats in the elections. The successor party of the BSPP, which was close to the military, the National Unity Party (NUP) was heavily defeated, securing only 25.12 per cent of the votes. See Taylor 2010: 409.

bridges, hospitals, etc.) and negotiating a series of ceasefires with ethnic insurgent groups. The latter could substantially reduce the internal armed threat that it faced (see below). In 1997 the junta reorganized and renamed itself the State Peace and Development Council in order to signal a shift from restoring order to fostering peace and development. The modernization of the coercive apparatus has been at the heart of the state-building programme. This entailed an expansion of the armed forces from 186,000 to more than 370,000 soldiers (Callahan 2003; Selth 2002; Myoe 2008). The military has subsequently enhanced its territorial representation in the country, which it deemed necessary for building roads and infrastructure. It has also increased its surveillance capacities. The military has allocated huge sums for defence expenditures throughout the 1990s (see Table 1). The military government spent more than 1 billion USD on 150 new combat aircrafts, 30 new naval vessels, 170 tanks, 2,500 armoured personnel carriers, as well as rocket-launching systems, infantry weapons and other hardware (Callahan 2001: 424). The military has also stirred up nationalism in order to achieve a rally-around-the-flag effect; moreover, it has been pointing out its historical role as builder of nation and state (Steinberg 2006: 102–110; Taylor 2010).

Table 1: Burma's Defence Expenditure by Year (1988–2003)[11]

Year	MMK (in billions)	% of GDP
1988	1.6	2.1
1989	3.7	3
1990	5.2	3.4
1991	5.9	3.2
1992	8.4	3.4
1993	12.7	3.5
1994	16.7	3.5
1995	22.3	3.7
1996	27.7	3.5
1997	29.8	2.7
1998	37.3	2.3
1999	43.7	2.0
2000	58.9	2.3
2001	63.9	1.8
2002	73.1	1.3
2003	-	2.3

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm; Note: from 2002–2010 no data available; data for 2002–2003 provided by Taylor 2010.

11 The evaluation of the actual level of Burma's annual defence expenditure is very difficult given the regime's opaqueness and secrecy. The expenditures vary significantly between different sources. For a discussion of various estimations see Selth (2002: 131–145).

With regard to economic liberalization, the military formally embraced a market economy after 1990. However, the economy of the country has remained completely state-controlled over the last two decades.[12] Moreover, after 1988 the military further expanded its business activities and economic bases. It built up the most important conglomerates in the country, the Union of Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (UMEH) and the Myanmar Economic Cooperation (MEC), which were given licences in diverse businesses such as construction, hotels, tourism, transport, gem and jade extraction and agriculture. As a consequence, the military became the most important business actor in the country (Selth 2002: 130).

5 From Direct Rule to Military Control: Burma's Transition to "Disciplined Democracy"

The military returned to civilian rule only after it succeeded in designing a political system that safeguarded its own core interests. The political changes fall short of a genuine democratic transition, since the military remains fully in control of the political system after having successfully manipulated the 2010 elections. Additionally, it has managed to orchestrate this transition process at every single stage. The military has continuously restricted political space so that oppositional forces have virtually no room to manoeuvre. Officially announced in late 2003 by General Khin Nyunt, the military's roadmap to "disciplined democracy" envisioned the installation of a new political system in seven steps: The first step was the reconvening of the National Convention to finalize the Constitution's basic principles, which were introduced at the 1993 National Convention. These codified the military's leading role in the participation of the state.[13] Like the first National Convention (1993–1996), the second was "marred by a lack of inclusiveness, heavy restrictions on public debate and little input by the participants into the final product" (Pederson 2011: 50). The two main opposition parties, the NLD and the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD), boycotted the National Convention. Although some ethnic parties participated, they ended up frustrated by their inability to influence the outcome. The drafting of the new constitution was finalized in February 2008, and in May 2008 it was formally approved in a nationwide referendum. The referendum was apparently manipulated, since the official results of 94.4 per cent in favour with a voter turnout of 98 per cent lacked any credibility (Pedersen 2011: 51). The new constitution enshrines military control. Although it formally establishes a multiparty democracy with elections for national and regional assemblies, the military will maintain a dominant role in the years to

12 Burma was continuously ranked among the lowest in the Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedoms throughout the 1990s. In 2011, it was ranked 174th of 179 countries (Heritage 2011).

13 The main objectives as later laid down in the Constitution were a) non-disintegration of the Union, b) non-disintegration of national solidarity, c) perpetuation of sovereignty, d) flourishing of a genuine, disciplined multiparty democratic system, e) enhancement of the eternal principles of justice, liberty and equality in the Union, and f) enabling of the Defence Services to be able to participate in the national political leadership role of the state (Constitution of Myanmar, 2008).

come. Of all regional and national parliament seats, 25 per cent are reserved for the military, and security-related ministries are also promised to the military. Moreover, the military remains fully autonomous, since it is not subject to civilian control.

The SPDC also managed to manipulate elections in November 2010 in a way that ensured military dominance. The junta fielded its own proxy party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), which is an offshoot of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), a mass organization with approximately 12 million members established by SLORC in 1993 to support its political agenda. Shortly before the elections, many leading SPDC generals, ministers and members of the military discarded their uniforms to join the party, which was led by former Prime Minister Thein Sein. The USDP had the financial backing of the regime, while the opposition faced severe financial hurdles because parties were required to pay high registration fees. Altogether, the pre-election playing field was tilted heavily in favour of the USDP (Bünte 2010; ICG 2011; NDI 2010). The main opposition party, the NLD, split over the issue of running in the election. While Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD boycotted the election, a splinter group, the National Democratic Force (NDF), ran in the elections and secured a few seats in the new parliament. The military-sponsored USDP won a huge majority of seats – 80 per cent in the lower house and 77 per cent in the upper house. The landslide victory of the USDP has arguably been the outcome of massive manipulations of the vote count (ICG 2011).

The transition to "disciplined democracy" has been accompanied by a wave of privatization measures. Two hundred and seventy-one state-owned companies have reportedly been sold to Than Shwe's closest cronies, such as Thay Zar, Zaw Zar and Chit Khaing (*Myanmar Times*, Govert. Property Auction nets K800b, 4 April 2011). While the military conglomerates have been weakened in this process, Than Shwe's informal influence has been consolidated. Altogether, the influence of the military conglomerates in the economy remains considerable.

Summing up, the generals' transition ensured a return to civilian rule without relinquishing de facto military control of the government. The military still remains the arbiter of power in the country, though it has created new political institutions that might develop some autonomy of their own in the future. Currently, the military dominates all important state institutions: The cabinet announced in March 2011 includes 26 retired military officials or former junta ministers and only four civilians. The number of civilians included in the cabinet is not higher than it was in 1993, when the SLORC included four civilians in its cabinet. Moreover, of the 14 chief ministers at the division and state levels, six are former SPDC commanders, and three are former SPDC ministers. Moreover, the military also controls a quarter of both legislatures directly, which were filled with lower-ranking officers, ensuring that the military bloc remains cohesive and compliant with the wishes of the military superiors (ICG 2011: 3). Since a quorum of 75 per cent is necessary to change the Constitution, the military effectively has a veto power over constitutional changes. Within the government, the new National Defence and Security Council is the most powerful institution, which is controlled by the com-

mander-in-chief of the armed forces. In terms of civil–military relations, the military remains fully autonomous subject to neither executive nor judicial civilian authority.

However, other power centres might develop some autonomy of their own in the future: The parliament – although dominated by the USDP and the military at the moment – might contribute to greater openness by debating key bills and criticizing the government. Another power centre is the ruling party, the USDP, which controls over half of the seats in both houses of the legislature: Although packed with former military men and led by former SPDC General Shwe Mann, it might develop policy initiatives of their own in the future. Another important aspect of the military's transition is the creation of regional governments, which are the seed of political decentralization. Although the local governments are headed by a chief minister appointed by the central government, the existence of elected regional legislatures allows a degree of ethnic autonomy within the ethnic states. This is especially important for those states where ethnic political parties have sizable minorities and whose representatives will be included as ministers in the local governments. However, the degree of military control over local autonomy will be considerable.

All in all, one has to conclude that the military's withdrawal from power does not mean a retreat into the barracks but rather a further institutionalization of military control. The military has managed to establish a competitive authoritarian regime, in which it remains the arbiter of power.

6 Endogenous and Exogenous Factors in the Military's Withdrawal (1988–2011)

To assess the internal reasons for the military's withdrawal from the apex of power, one has to look at the changing dynamics within the military regime, the development of the military's interests, ideology and coherence over time. The Tatmadaw's leadership has always seen itself as the defender of national unity, and internal security has always been directed toward domestic politics. When the military-backed socialist regime was under the imminent threat of breakdown due to the student revolt in 1988, the military reorganized itself and embarked on a massive modernization programme. Harbouring a strong distrust of politicians and ethnic leaders, the armed forces conflated their own interests with those of the regime and government (Selth 2002; Myoe 2008; Than 1998: 391). Apart from strong nationalistic feelings and a strong esprit de corps, the "persistent sense of vulnerability" (Selth 2002: 43) of the regime seemed to have contributed to the modernization of both army and state. After 1988, the regime seemed to have feared cooperation between democracy activists and ethnic insurgents. Arguably, at various points in time, the government has felt there was a threat of a foreign-led invasion: During the student demonstrations, Burma's state-owned media had reported about the presence of a US naval fleet in the country's territorial waters. The regime was also concerned that foreign powers could help insurgents on the border to develop armed forces that would challenge the new regime in Rangoon. The top generals also may

have feared an Iraq-like intervention by the US or a UN-led intervention like in East Timor. The relocation of the administrative capital from Rangoon to Naypyitaw in 2006 underscored the continuity of this point (Myoe 2007). As a consequence, the military regime was "prepared to take whatever measures were required to recover and consolidate its grip on government" (Selth 2002: 33). The regime formulated three broad "national causes": 1. non-disintegration of the Union, 2. non-disintegration of national solidarity; and 3. perpetuation of national sovereignty, from which it derived its own "Defence Mission". The third "cause" gave the army a leadership role in the management of the state (Selth 2002: 30).[14]

The modernization of the armed forces has been a huge challenge for the military's cohesion, since different factions of the armed forces developed different organizational and corporate interests. Nevertheless, the military has managed to remain relatively coherent over the last two decades. It managed to avoid a split between the hardliners and "softliners" and a subsequent schism in the coercive apparatus (Stepan 1988: 55), which in some Latin American and East Asian cases has led to a liberalization of the political systems through elite pacts between military "softliners" and oppositional moderates. Although the Burmese armed forces have not been free from factionalism and internal rifts, the military junta has eased these tensions through purges at the top level, routine reshuffles and institutional reorganizations. These measures have strengthened the unity of the military and the centralized command structure under the leadership of General Than Shwe, who himself became commander and chairman of the SLORC after a palace coup against junta chief Saw Maung in 1992. Patronage and increasing surveillance have also guaranteed the long-term, monolithic cohesion of the armed forces (Callahan 2001; Min 2008; Kyaw 2009).

One set of intra-military tensions has resulted from factionalism at the top of the SPDC. In the early 1990s, SLORC was dominated by the triumvirate of Senior General Than Shwe, General Maung Aye and Major General Khin Nyunt. Khin Nyunt was the head of Military Intelligence (MI), an extremely powerful body that was deeply engaged in business activities, especially at regional levels, where it was colliding with the interests of regular army officers. General Khin Nyunt was often seen as a "moderate" because he was the architect of numerous ceasefire agreements with ethnic groups, negotiated with opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi about possible reforms and represented the junta as the liaison to the international community. As he became too powerful for the other two leading generals Than Shwe and Maung Aye – supposedly "hardliners" – in September 2004 Khin Nyunt was purged and his intelligence apparatus was dismantled. The purge allegedly came after he refused to follow an order from Senior General Than Shwe to relinquish the intelligence apparatus and punish his corrupt intelligence officers (Min 2008). In the years following the purge, Senior General Than Shwe has regularly promoted his followers into top positions, thus centralizing

14 According to Maung Aung Myoe, Than Shwe made a secret speech to his senior military commanders in July 1997, in which he explained Burma's defence policy for the first time (Myoe 2008). This policy, however, corresponds to earlier policies of the regime (Selth 2002: 31).

the command structure and strengthening the unity of the armed forces. With this move, the hardliners within the SPDC have resoundingly defeated the "softliners" (Callahan 2007: 37; Kyaw 2009: 288; Min 2008).

Another set of intra-military tensions was put to rest in the mid-1990s: Tensions had mounted between the junta in Rangoon and powerful regional commanders, which were given powers in their respective regions to conduct their own administrative and military affairs. The power of these "warlords" was subsequently "re-centralized" by requiring regional commanders to serve as members of the junta and by regularly assigning regional commanders to positions in the War Office and the cabinet in Rangoon (Callahan 2007; Min 2008: 1025).

Whereas negative consequences of factionalism at the top along with central regional relations within the regime have been minimized through institutional reorganization and regular reshuffles, the issue of leadership change at the upper echelons remained a serious problem. The "transition to disciplined democracy" has solved these problems for both the junta chief and the top generals in the military hierarchy. It provided a "retirement plan" for Senior General Than Shwe, who has stepped down from the position of junta leader and commander in chief of the armed forces.[15] General Maung Aye has also retired. Other top leaders and regional commanders have discarded their army uniforms, changed into party dresses and use their power, for instance, as chief ministers in the regions. These changes have eased generational pressures within the army, since a younger cohort of military leaders can now rise within the ranks without creating too much competition or risk of a military coup. Some elements in the armed forces did not support the loss of power and resisted the new civilian posts assigned to them by Senior General Than Shwe. In February, the SPDC reportedly placed Lt. General Myint Aung under house arrest because he allegedly refused to be transferred to the less powerful position of defence minister (*Mizzima News*, Myint Aung Rejects Defence Minister Job: Reportedly under Arrest, 10 February 2011; *Irrawaddy*, Myint Aung Dismissed, Placed under House Arrest, 10 February 2011).

To assess the external influences on the military's withdrawal, one has to look at the configuration of civilian forces in the light of existing opportunity structures and the internal and external security environment during the last two decades.[16] All in all, the SLORC/SPDC has managed to prevent any major organization from effectively toppling the military regime over the last two decades. The degree of repression has been constantly high, as the military banned assemblies of more than five people, censored the media and effectively controlled

15 He is believed to use his personal influence through patronage and personal connections from behind the scenes (*Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 2011; ICG 2011).

16 The analysis does not look at the impact of economic factors due to the unreliability of the Burmese government's official economic data. Burma's economy is heavily dependent on the income generated by the export of natural resources (above all natural gas). Its economic performance is heavily contested. Since the country is not integrated into the world economy, the impact of external economic factors (e.g. the recent financial crisis) can be considered quite low (see McCarthy 2000; Turnell 2008).

oppositional forces. Whereas the country has only a very small middle class and no strong labour organizations or mass organizations – except those of the regime-sponsored USDA – the main threats to the regime emanated from actions of the NLD, remnants of the 1988 student movement and Buddhist monks. When the military regime has been threatened, it has constantly used harsh measures to suppress these "destructive elements". The NLD has come under intense pressure since the early 1990s, when it engaged in a confrontational policy to force the junta to convene parliament and transfer power. Leading members of the NLD have been under house arrest for most of the last 20 years,[17] while local party cadres were often intimidated, harassed or jailed. Many of them also had to flee the country due to constant repression. Under constant pressure from the military regime, the NLD leadership lacked room to manoeuvre to build up its own strength and force the military out of office. Moreover, it subsequently "failed to come up with concrete strategies to deal with the military government" (Kyaw 2007: 41; also Zin 2010). Apart from government repression, factional infighting and low social capital also weakened the strategic importance of the NLD, which was not able to profit from the factional struggles in the SPDC (Hlaing 2007: 17). On the contrary, after 20 years of repression the SPDC has managed to weaken the opposition even further, since it has managed effectively to split the opposition: While the NLD decided to boycott the general's 2010 election[18] and subsequently lost its status as an official party, a splinter group, the National Democratic Force (NDF), participated and managed to secure 12 seats in both houses of parliament altogether. Despite the general political failure of the NLD to bring about a transfer of power, however, the NLD was able to seriously undermine the military government's legitimacy in the eyes of the international community. Many Western countries linked their Burma policy to the fate of opposition leader and Nobel Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi: After she began to call for sanctions in 1997, many Western states enacted targeted sanctions in order to protest Burma's human rights abuses and its foot dragging in terms of moving toward democracy. Sanctions were even tightened after the attack on Aung San Suu Kyi in 2003 (see below).

Another part of the opposition against the military has been the student movement, which has been sporadically active after 1988. For instance, in 1996 university students staged demonstrations in order to call for improvements in the education system. The military reacted with repression: Over 100 students were arrested and jailed. Most university buildings were closed for years and later relocated to suburban areas to prevent further demonstrations.

17 Party leader Aung San Suu Kyi was put under house arrest for the first time in July 1989 for "endangering the state". She was released in 1995, but was not allowed to travel outside of Rangoon. Altogether, she has spent 15 years under house arrest. The last house arrest lasted from 2003 till 2010. Shortly after the elections, she was again released.

18 The NLD boycotted the elections because the leadership considered the election laws unfair.

The most serious internal threat to military power, however, came from the demonstrations of Buddhist monks in September 2007, which ended in another brutal crackdown and the death of 31 Buddhist monks.[19] Although these demonstrations have not threatened the cohesion within the ranks of the military, they have challenged its claim to traditional legitimacy as rulers of the devoutly Buddhist country (Hlaing 2009; Steinberg 2006: 94–97; McCarthy 2008: 312).

Summing up, one can say that oppositional groups failed to bring about a regime change in the country. They have neither forced the military into dialogue nor helped to ease repression. They have, however, seriously undermined the legitimacy (international, traditional) of the military government, which might have accelerated the "transition to disciplined democracy".

With regard to internal security, the situation has completely changed since 1988. When the army took over power again in 1988, more than 20 substantial insurgent groups remained active with about 40,000 soldiers combined (Smith 1999, 2006; Taylor 2010: 443). Some of these groups had full control over their territory, with self-administration in foreign relations, school and hospital management. Since the beginning of the 1990s the security situation has completely changed. During the 1990s and 2000s the military regime managed to negotiate ceasefire agreements with most ethnic groups. Today, there are only three numerically important groups fighting the government that no longer control substantial territory: the Karen National Union (KNU),[20] with an estimated 2,000 combatants, the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), with approximately 500–1,000 militia members, and the Shan State Army South with 3,000–4,000 soldiers.[21] The government has officially signed ceasefire agreements with 17 ethnic groups, which allowed these groups a certain degree of autonomy, often including the concession to maintain their arms and control over their territory (Petersen 2008; South 2004; Smith 2006; Oo/Min 2007).[22] While the overall security situation has improved markedly since the early 1990s, there is still ongoing violence and the risk of a renewed escalation of violence. Whether the transition to indirect rule will entail a new round of violence between the new government and the ethnic groups remains to be seen.[23]

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19 The protests started in August 2007 with small-scale demonstrations of students and democracy activists against the sudden increase in (government-controlled) fuel prices. When several demonstrating Buddhist monks were mistreated by the security forces in Pakkoku in September 2007, the movement turned into a countrywide protest movement. The largely religious protest quickly gathered momentum as the All-Burma Monks Alliance.

20 The KNU entered into ceasefire talks with the military government. The "gentleman's agreement", however, broke down after the purge of General Khin Nyunt.

21 There is also a further dozen small splinter groups operating at the Indian-Burmese and Thai-Burmese borders. These groups have only a few hundred soldiers.

22 As Ashley South (2004) notes, the precise terms of these ceasefires are not known, but in general it is clear that the terms are not uniform across all groups with which the government has ceasefire agreements.

23 There are some indications that the transition to "disciplined democracy" has fuelled ethnic conflicts. The military government's plan to transform the armies of the ethnic groups into border guards of the Tatmadaw has met with fierce resistance from certain ethnic groups. While smaller forces have agreed to integrate into the

The international security situation has also completely changed since the early 1990s, and the military junta has been confronted with a new strategic environment. Most members of the international community have attempted to persuade the military government to change its behaviour vis-à-vis its own citizens. We can identify three approaches to achieving this goal:

1) The "hardliners", led by the US, the UK and to a lesser extent the EU, have imposed economic sanctions, including an effective ban on financial assistance, travel restrictions and an arms embargo. In 2005, the US also succeeded in bringing the attention of the UN Security Council to Burma, where the US declared the situation a threat to regional security. When the generals did not allow foreign aid to come into the country in the wake of the cyclone Nargis, some Western politicians also invoked the concept of "responsibility to protect" to further enhance the pressure on the junta (Bünte 2008; Haake 2008). In general, most states attempted to force the generals to accept the 1990s election results and return to the barracks. During the last decade, however, the approaches have softened and focused on the release of political prisoners, national reconciliation and human rights themes. However, implicit in this more nuanced approach is a "strong demand for regime change" (Selth 2008: 287). These political and economic measures against Burma were denounced as interference in Burma's own internal affairs and were thus firmly rejected. Senior spokesmen for the regime accused Western powers of neocolonialism and of trying to harm Burma's economy and attempting to dictate domestic politics.
2) The second approach has been more pragmatic. In line with the charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), of which Burma became a member in 1997, the ASEAN governments have attempted to engage Burma. The Asian way of avoiding direct criticism was believed to be more successful, as it would allow the junta to build up contacts to the outside world and to foster economic development. Continued economic growth would eventually lead to increasing spaces for civil society and acceptance of international norms.
3) The third group, led by China, Russia and India, has developed close ties to the junta. These countries attempt to promote greater stability in the country in order to further their own strategic interests (Selth 2008; Haake 2010; Holliday 2009).

Given the unreliability of the Burmese economic data and the lack of access to Burma's hardliner generals, it is difficult to say precisely what all these approaches have achieved over the past two decades. It is safe to say, however, that no economic sanction regime can work effectively when the sanctioned regime has access to finances, arms and diplomatic support. The pragmatists have been equally unsuccessful in encouraging far-reaching political re-

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future system, stronger groups such as Shan State Army North, the New Mon State Party and the United Wa State Army (UWSA) have rejected this proposal. Another sign of ethnic conflicts is the breakdown of the ceasefire with the KIO in June 2011 (TNI 2011).

forms. One can conclude that "external factors have been largely incidental in this process" (Selth 2008: 288). Indeed, it can be said that despite all the measures taken against Burma over the last two decades, the regime has become stronger and the army could even tighten its grip over the country.

7 Summary and Conclusion

The military's withdrawal from the apex of power in March 2011 does not signal a full retreat from politics. The generals' transition ensured a return to civilian rule without relinquishing de facto military control of the government. The military remains the arbiter of power in the country. It dominates all important state institutions. During its transition to "disciplined democracy", it has succeeded in designing a new political system, in which it controls important state institutions. The military has institutionalized its "leading role" in the new competitive authoritarian system. There is some room for autonomy of civilian forces within the ruling party, which until now has been dominated by former generals. Due to the privatization drive in recent years, the role of the armed forces' conglomerates in the economy has been diminished. However, the conglomerates still remain the most important business actors in the country, although the generals' cronies have managed to secure some of the key state assets.

Why did the military abandon the driver's seat, and what accounts for the transition from military rule to military control? This paper proposes that the new situation can be attributed to a transformation in the internal and external factors that impact the military's moods and motives as well as its disposition to intervene. Table 2 illustrates these factors and evaluates their positive or negative impact on military intervention.

Some points stand out: In general, the conditions for a retreat of the military from politics on the whole are quite negative and have only slightly improved over the last two decades. The long endurance of military rule, the officers' deeply entrenched self-perception as guardians of the unitary state, the deep mistrust of politicians, the ongoing armed conflict within the country (despite a much-improved situation since the mid-1990s), the constant fear of external intervention in various guises – all these conditions have remained more or less the same during the last two decades.

Table 2: Endogenous and Exogenous Factors of Military Intervention in Burma (1990–2011)

	Early 1990s	**Early 2000s**	**End of 2000s**
Endogenous Factors			
Ideological cohesion	Supporters of new professionalism (-1)	Supporters of new professionalism (-1)	Supporters of new professionalism (younger generation might be more professional) (-1)
Organizational cohesion in military junta (SLORC/SPDC)	High degree of factionalization (-1)	Medium degree of factionalization (0)	Stable factionalization (+1)
Personal interest	Leadership vacuum, fear of personal persecution (-1)	Consolidated leadership, still fear of personal persecution (0)	Safe succession, fear of personal persecution reduced (+1)
Economic interests	Economic interests outside military sphere (-1)	Economic interests outside military sphere (-1)	Economic interests outside military sphere (-1)
Exogenous Factors			
Civilian forces	No consensus on military role in politics / high degree of polarization (- 1)	No consensus on military role / high degree of polarization (-1)	No consensus on military role in politics / high degree of polarization (-1)
Internal security	High rate of violent conflict (-1)	Medium rate of political conflict (-1)	Medium rate of political conflict (-1)
External security	Perceived external threats (-1)	Perceived external threats (-1)	Perceived external threats (-1)
Economy	(0)	(0)	(0)
Scale from -8 to 8 (unweighted)	(-7)	-5	-3

Key: +1 means conducive, 0 means neutral, -1 means negative.

Second, the retreat from direct rule and transition to military control can be attributed to several internal factors. The transition toward "disciplined democracy" has solved the problem of leadership change in the armed forces for both junta chief Than Shwe and top generals in the military hierarchy, who have either retired or discarded their uniforms. These changes have eased generational pressures within the army, since a younger cohort of military leaders can now rise within the ranks without creating too much competition and risks of a military coup. Since the old guard has managed to design a political system under military control, they can also resign without having to fear being persecuted or being held responsible for past human rights violations.

Third, exogenous factors have hardly changed over the last two decades. Although many military regimes worldwide have been transformed due to changing external environments (Siaroff 2009; Croissant et al. 2011), the exogenous environment of military rule in Burma has remained more or less constant for the last two decades. The opportunity structures have

hardly allowed the military to abdicate: The opposition has attempted to force the military to accept the results of the 1990s election and transfer power. It has used a confrontational strategy to force leading generals to transfer power. Moreover, it has attempted to mobilize the international community to question the legitimacy of the ruling junta. These strategies had a huge impact on the international community, which in recent years has both strengthened its engagement (UN, ASEAN) and its sanction tools (US, UK). However, neither of these strategies has achieved the desired results. The military, which has managed to modernize its coercive and repressive tools in recent years, has curtailed the room to manoeuvre of the political and ethnic opposition. It has also managed to split the opposition into a more moderate group, which is now working within the military-dominated system, and a hardline group. However, it might have been the lacking "external" acceptance and growing "internal" pressures that led the military government to transfer power to a new civilian government and change from military rule to military control. Yet, the transition to "disciplined democracy" falls short of a genuine transition to democracy, since every single step of the generals' transition has been carefully guarded and kept under control. The transition established a "competitive authoritarian regime", in which the playing field was heavily tilted toward the party dominated by the military.[24] These findings confirm the dictum of O'Donnell and Schmitter that "there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence – direct or indirect – of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the fluctuating cleavages between hardliners and softliners" (O'Donnell/Schmitter 1985: 19). If these divisions do not come to the fore in military regimes, or if hardliners prevail, the evolving transition might lead to another form of authoritarianism. The case of Burma illustrates that military dominance can be sustained even after the military formally retreats from power. The ongoing discussion in civil–military relations debates about the exact conceptualization of civilian control will shed further light on the diverse roles militaries play in diverse forms of authoritarian regimes.

24 This, however, is hardly surprising, since the regional norm in Southeast Asia is – with some notable exceptions – electoral authoritarianism (Bünte/Croissant 2011).

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