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The US Policy on Democracy in Burma (1988 - 2021)

Duong Quang Hiep¹

Abstract

After General Saw Maung's military coup in 1988, a military junta was established in Burma. The junta established the National Law and Order Restoration Commission (SLORC), which declared martial law after mass protests. This has posed many challenges in relations between Burma and Western countries, including the United States. Since 1988, US policy towards Burma has focused heavily on democracy and human rights issues, increasing pressure to promote freedom and democracy in this country. The United States implemented a policy of promoting democratization in Burma through two stages (1988 - 2001 and 2001 - 2021) that contributed to changing the face of democracy in this country until General Min Aung Hlaing once again overthrow the civilian government in Burma. The study aims to analyze U.S. policies and evaluate the results in promoting democratization in Burma through the two aforementioned phases. To achieve these goals, the article uses analytical and comparison methods based on the latest published research and document sources on the issue. The research results contribute to assessing the impact of US policies on promoting the democratization process in Burma in the period 1988 - 2021, and also contribute to the study of US relations - Burma in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century.

Keywords: *The United States, Burma, Democracy, Policy, Human Rights, Saw Maung*

Introduction

The first connection in history between Burma ² and the United States began with the letter sent by the king of Burma - Mindon (1853 - 1878) to the 14th President of the United States - Franklin Pierce ³ in 1856. King Mindon hoped the Americans would agree to a bilateral treaty that would provide Burma with some defense against British aggression. Franklin Pierce's successor, President James Buchanan, responded amicably but without commitment. By the late 1850s, Burmese students had arrived in the United States. However, it was not until 1947 that the United States and Burma established official diplomatic relations, but the relationship between the two countries always faced

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² It should also be added that, in 1989, the military government of General Saw Maung changed the name of Burma to Myanmar. However, the US government still uses the old name of Burma (Burma) to this day. Therefore, in the article, the author still uses the name Burma.

³ "If the Royal Kingdom and the great United States of America form a bond of friendship, it is our part to wish that the two great Nations through all generations to come may cultivate friendly relations; and that Traders and ordinary people and all walks of life can greatly benefit" [From The dawn of Myanmar-US relations at <https://lostfootsteps.org/en/history/the-dawn-of-myanmar-us-relations.>].

turbulence and tension revolving around democracy and human rights characterized by a military regime, established in Myanmar in 1988 following the coup of General Saw Maung. Since then, US policy towards Burma has focused heavily on increasing pressure and promoting human rights and freedom and democracy in this country. This is also one of the highlights of the US foreign policy towards Myanmar since military forces came to power in this country after the coup in 1988 (led by General Saw Maung) until now. From this point on, the policies towards Myanmar that the United States implemented in stages led to different results, contributing to changing the face of democracy in Burma until the Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi was ousted in a military coup on February 1, 2021 led by General Min Aung Hlaing.

The US policy towards Burma from 1988 to 2001

Burma's post-colonial period was characterized by military dominance as a key player in state politics during the 62 years since the end of British rule (1948). Ignoring the relatively brief "parliamentary period" (1948 - 1962) - when the ruling coalition was marred by factionalism and the interphase conflicts that had occurred with the newly formed state – unification. The rule of the military persists under various guises to this day, to the point that the term "Tatmadaw" (army) is often synonymous with the state, where "military officers are political actors. ... precisely through their actual or threatened use of force" (Nordlinger, 1976). The most recent body of the military regime is the Federal Peace and Development Council (SPDC), established in 1997 after quelling mass uprisings since 1988 and the pro-democracy movement - National League for Democracy (NLD). In the situation of economic - political - social crisis that broke out strongly in 1988, threatening the existence of the authoritarian government, bringing the country of Burma to the brink of mass revolution, the forces of Radicals in the apparatus of the military dictatorship led by General Saw Maung staged a coup on September 18, 1988. General Saw Maung's measures were merely to replace the old leadership with a new one by abolishing the Revolutionary Council and establishing the National Law and Order Restoration Council.⁴ (SLORC). Although the national general election held in 1990 represented the further development of Burmese democracy within the sphere of influence of the military, the military firmly retained its state power and refused to transfer political power to the National League for Democracy. This makes Burma even more economic sanctions imposed by the US and the European Union (EU). The United States began to intensify sanctions on Burma in 1988 when the military took power and increased repression against democracy activists⁵. Following the 8888 Uprising, a series of measures were adopted by the United States to restrict travel, control financial transactions, and freeze assets for individuals and entities associated with the military

⁴ On January 15, 1997, the military regime in Burma dissolved the Law and Order Restoration Council and was reorganized into the Federal Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

⁵ Known as the 8888 Uprising, was a series of marches, demonstrations, and riots that took place across Burma to overthrow the dictatorial government of General Ne Win. Soon after, the National Law and Order Restoration Council carried out a bloody crackdown that left thousands of dead. During the crisis, Aung San Suu Kyi became a symbol of democracy. When the junta held an election in 1990, her party, the National League for Democracy, won 80% of the seats in parliament (392 out of 492). However, the junta rejected the election results, refused to hand over power, and launched a crackdown on the pro-democracy movement.

regime, as well as banning imports and investments in US companies. In addition to imposing an arms embargo on Burma in 1993, President Bill Clinton's administration imposed Executive Order 13047: Banning new investment in Burma on May 20, 1997 on political grounds. The policies of the former junta in Naypidaw pose a threat to the national security of the United States. The United States also lowered the level of representation in Burma from Ambassador to Charge d'affaires (Timeline, 2010). The EU also imposes visa restrictions on members of the military regime, their families and allies, and freezes military regime-related assets abroad.

Because of particularly serious violations of religious freedom, the United States also placed Burma on the country of particular concern (CPC) list under the International Religious Freedom Act. Burma is also designated as a Tier 3 country on the Trafficking in Persons Report for the Use of Forced Labor and will therefore be subject to additional sanctions. At the 6th ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Singapore on July 26, 1999, US Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright highlighted Burma as one of the challenges threatening the security of Southeast Asia: “Burma continues to pose a threat to regional stability due to the government's failure to prevent large-scale drug production and trafficking activities, and because its repressive policies have created conflict and cause an influx of refugees. The United States urges Burma to turn around and begin dialogue with the democratic opposition, including Aung San Suu Kyi and other representative groups” (Regional Forum,1999).

Admission of Burma to ASEAN and US attitudes:

Since the end of the Cold War, ASEAN has stepped up activities and expanded its membership with the goal of including all 10 Southeast Asian countries. The expansion has been seen by senior ASEAN leaders as a way to add weight and credibility to the Association as a group representing all of Southeast Asia. ASEAN since the Cold War has begun to pursue a policy that many call “constructive engagement” towards Burma. However, Burma's membership is particularly controversial, both within and outside of ASEAN. ASEAN's receptivity to Burma has been harshly criticized by some Western governments, especially the US.

At the ARF meeting in 1997, US Secretary of State M. Albright stated that: “Burma is the only country in ASEAN that possesses an illegal apparatus where the police arrest legitimate business people to stop currency fluctuations, where public schools are frequently closed to prevent political unrest. Burma is also the only member of ASEAN that enjoys government protection and profits from the drug trade... The admission of Burma presents a challenge: avoiding the possibility of a deep hole in ASEAN, between one part is open, integrated and prosperous and another is closed, isolated and poor” (Asia's New, 1997).

The situation in Burma is one of ASEAN's most serious problems. The military regime in Burma rejected the results of the elections held in 1990 (with the victory of the National League for Democracy led by Aung San Suu Kyi) and detained her for a period of time. The issue of Myanmar's admission to ASEAN has raised conflicts between the

organization and the US as well as the European Union. Human rights have always been one of the issues causing tension and disagreement between ASEAN and the United States. Human rights is also one of the three pillars of US policy in the Asia-Pacific region, which is sometimes considered by the US as the highest priority and becomes a matter of principle in the relationship between the US and South East Asian countries, as well as with China - two key objects of the US (Thuy, 2003). With its principle of autonomy, on July 27, 1997, ASEAN accepted Burma as a member of the Association despite the objections of the US and Western countries. The admission of Burma into ASEAN is not only aimed at establishing a unified Southeast Asian region, but also to avoid Burma falling into the control orbit of any major power, and that will cause consequences to peace and stability in Southeast Asia. Researcher Carlyle A. Thayer in an article said: "The geostrategic reality ... ensures that ASEAN can never boycott Myanmar. Unlike outsiders, neighbors must live together forever. Patient, responsive diplomacy is often the only viable approach to difficult relationships. For ASEAN, attacking Yangon (Rangoon) will produce another undesirable outcome by pushing the Burmese into China's orbit" (Carlyle, 1997). Therefore, despite facing considerable pressure from the outside, especially from the US, Chairman of the ASEAN Standing Committee Ali Alatas affirmed: "The admission of who is a member, for which country is the status of an observer - that's the right of ASEAN" (Thuy, 2003).

ASEAN leaders also argued that Burma's separation from ASEAN would not serve the Association's long-term interests. Speaking at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said, in a clear reference to the US attitude towards Burma, that: "It is unfortunate that there are those who will not see the obvious things. Instead of encouraging ASEAN to accept all Southeast Asian countries as soon as possible, ASEAN was urged to pass the ruling, deny membership and put pressure on a potential candidate... to forcing that country to continue to plunge into poverty and chaos. ASEAN must resist and reject such attempts at coercion - that is not the way of ASEAN" (Peter & Don 2007).

When Burma was accepted as an ASEAN member, there was hope within the Association that there would be a gradual liberalization in the country. However, what has been done by the military regime in Burma still shows the inconsistency in political reform and the position of the military government that has caused many problems for ASEAN in its relations with Vietnam, major external partners, especially the United States and the European Union.

US policy towards Burma for the period 2001 – 2021

Continuing to pursue the policy of sanctions against Burma, during his two terms, President G.W. Bush issued many measures to press the junta to democratize the country. Following the brutal attack on a convoy of the National League for Democracy in Depayin, Central Burma on May 30, 2003, a series of laws and executive orders related to Burma were enacted during this time to impose financial sanctions on the military government of this country such as the Burma Freedom and Democracy Act (BFDA - 2003) which includes a ban on all imports from Burma, a ban on the export of financial services to

Burma, freezing the assets of certain organizations and individuals, restricting the issuance of visas to Burmese officials; The Tom Lantos Act (2008) prohibits the importation of jade and rubies from Burma or crafted from a third country; Executive Orders such as EO 13310: Burma Government Asset Blockade and Certain Transactions Ban (2003), EO 13448: Asset Freeze and Prohibition of Certain Burma-related Transactions (2007), EO 13464: Asset Freeze and Prohibition several transactions involving Burma (2008)... that extend sanctions to include asset freezes for designated individuals and organizations that provide financial or material assistance substances to designated individuals or the Burmese Military Government.

The administration of President G.W. Bush carried out a policy of high pressure, not only imposing severe sanctions on Burma's military regime but also putting pressure on ASEAN, demanding the organization take appropriate actions that are compatible with US policies and actions. However, it is the tough policy of the US towards Burma that has received much criticism and opposition from ASEAN and many other Asian countries (Hung & Tony 2012).

The problems that Burma poses for ASEAN increased in 2007 and 2008. In September 2007, a series of protests against the Burmese government were led by Buddhist monks. In the days following September 17, 2007, protests by monks and supporters of the National League for Democracy were violently suppressed by the regime: at least 31 people were killed and thousands arrested. (Taylor, 2008). President G.W. Bush condemned Burma and threatened new sanctions against it: "I strongly condemn these actions and the administration's refusal to accept the need for real change in Burma. ...the regime continues to arrest and harass monks and democracy activists...If the regime continues to ignore calls for a real democratic transition and release For Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, the United States should stand ready to lead international efforts to place more sanctions on the regime" (Reuter, 2007). As for ASEAN, the foreign ministers of the member countries during an informal meeting on September 27, 2007 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, issued an unusually strong statement in response. The ministers said they were appalled to hear reports of the use of automatic weapons and demanded that the Burmese Government immediately stop using violence against protesters. ASEAN expresses its opposition to the use of violence against protesters, calls on Burma to show restraint, continue efforts for national reconciliation and calls for the release of all political detainees. including Aung San Suu Kyi⁶. However, ASEAN failed to reach a consensus to try to take any further institutional steps related to Burma, such as suspending membership. When ASEAN held its annual Summit in Singapore in November 2007, Burma participated as usual.

The military regime in Burma has once again been subjected to harsh criticism by many countries and the international community in response to Cyclone Nargis that hit the country on May 2, 2008 which devastated many large area of the Irrawaddy plain. The storm caused a great loss of life (Government estimate is more than 130,000), but at first

⁶ Statement by ASEAN Chair, Singapore s Minister for Foreign Affairs George Yeo, New York, 27 September 2007.

the Burmese government tried to limit information on the situation and rejected many offers of assistance from the government and foreign governments and NGOs. Burmese authorities' slow response to severe damage caused by Cyclone Nargis, including denial of access to foreign media and refusal to accept aid from US naval vessels and other naval vessels stationed near the country's coast have drawn international criticism. President G.W. Bush said that "an angry world should condemn the way the Burmese military rulers are handling the aftermath of a terrible storm" and "They (the military junta) are here with a great disaster, and (they) do not allow the full power of a benevolent world to help them"(Klug, 2008). For ASEAN, however, the Burmese military junta's rejection of extra-regional humanitarian aid created the need and opportunity for the organization to act. The Burmese government allowed the ASEAN Emergency Assessment Team to visit the country (May 9-18, 2008), although it did not have extensive access to the areas devastated by Cyclone Nargis. The Burmese military regime also allows aid groups from individual ASEAN countries to directly access many areas, and accepts financial and essential support, but does not accept support from non-ASEAN countries (Richard, 2008).

While ASEAN has been able to play a helpful role in easing the deadlock in accessing aid to Burma, the political situation in the country has remained unchanged. During the ASEAN ministerial meetings in July 2008 in Singapore, Burma was again the focus of attention. While Myanmar announced in meetings that it had ratified the ASEAN Charter, it also indicated that Aung San Suu Kyi's house arrest would continue at least until 2009. At ministerial meeting, ASEAN foreign ministers once again criticized Burma. The ASEAN Joint Communiqué acknowledges recent developments in Burma's peaceful transition to democracy, but calls on Burma to take stronger steps and also calls for the release of all political detainees, including Aung San Suu Kyi (Joint Communiqué, 2008).

ASEAN is clearly facing major ongoing problems regarding Burma. While ASEAN ministers protested on domestic conditions, the groups' capacity to respond was affected by internal divisions in approach. Members with democratic political systems (especially Indonesia and the Philippines) support a hardline stance towards the Burmese regime, but other members (including new members Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam) and some members with significant domestic economic interests (such as Thailand) do not support assertive policies towards the military regime in this country (Tim, 2008). Furthermore, the military regime, while resisting ASEAN's efforts to engage and dialogue, has moved to deepen relations with China and India - relations that are seen as helping to strengthen the relationship between the two countries. China has developed a significant relationship with Burma, including major oil and gas pipeline projects from Burma to southern China that will allow China to reduce its dependence on shipping routes. shipping through the East Sea. India has also maintained a close relationship with Burma and has benefited from working with it to limit anti-India insurgency activity on the border with Burma (Taylor, 2008). Until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, the situation in Burma continued to be a major obstacle on the road to a de facto ASEAN Political-Security Community and a major problem for the formation of the ASEAN Political-Security Community.

Under President B. Obama (2009 - 2017), relations between the US and Burma improved significantly, stemming from the political and economic reforms of the Burmese government. The United States has also changed its approach to democracy in Burma with softer measures, towards a more flexible approach to the democratization issue in Burma, and increased dialogue with the country. At the first US-ASEAN Summit in November 2009 in Singapore, President B. Obama raised the issue of human rights violations in Burma and demanded democratic reform and dialogue with political leaders, and called on the military government to release all political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi. The joint statement issued at the summit expressed hope that the new dialogue between the United States and Burma, as well as ASEAN's efforts to work with the Burmese government, would "contribute to the improvements made by the United States and Myanmar. There was also a call for the Government of Burma to conduct the proposed 2010 general election in a "fair, free, inclusive and transparent" manner (Joint Statement, 2009).

Changes in US policy towards Burma and implications for ASEAN in relation to Burma were the main focus in 2009. Senator Jim Webb, Chairman of the Subcommittee on East Asian Affairs and Pacific Senate, in August 2009 became the first member of Congress in 10 years to visit Burma. Senator J. Webb also visited Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, where he told leaders that ASEAN should call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi (ASEAN, 2009).

Partial elections in 2010 led to a peaceful transition after 60 years of chaos and conflict to a quasi-civilian government led by former general Thein Sein. Under President Thein Sein, the Government of Burma initiated a series of political and economic reforms, which led to a significant opening of the long-isolated country. These reforms included the release of many political prisoners (Foreign Affairs, 2012) and child soldiers, signed ceasefire agreements with 8 major ethnic groups, exercised freedom of expression, NGOs were allowed to form and participate in political, economic and development life and changes to currency and foreign investment rules. These have happened amid improved relations between the junta and the National League for Democracy since the government released Aung San Suu Kyi in November, 2010. On March 30, 2011, General Than Shwe on behalf of the leadership of the Federal Council for Peace and Development announced the dissolution of this agency. This is an important step towards the democratization process in Burma. Actions to democratize political life in the country continue: In October 2011, the Parliament of Burma passed a new Labor Law that allows workers to form labor unions and allows strike. In addition, a law passed by the National Assembly in November 2011 allows the organization of peaceful protests. The government has also relaxed some censorship rules and restrictions on foreign journalists and broadened access to news (Naing, 2012). The political climate in Burma gradually opened up and led to by-elections to the National Assembly in 2012, where pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Peoples were elected. The owner won 43 of the 45 contested seats. In the 2015 national historic elections, the National League for Democracy won a total

majority of seats in the National Parliament and in most state and regional parliaments (U.S. Department of States, 2021).

Changes in U.S. policy toward Burma were kicked off during Secretary of State Hilary Clinton's visit to the country in December 2011. This is the first visit by a US Secretary of State to Myanmar in more than 50 years. Secretary of State H. Clinton described the changes in Burma as "the first steps towards a long-awaited opening up, and announced that the United States would implement its policy of contact with Burma on "action for action" principle. Since then, the policy and relations between the US and Burma have changed with rapid improvements and remarkable progress. Democratic political reforms and progress in US-Burma relations have created conditions for international organizations such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) return and participate in helping this country develop its economy and improve people's living standards.

After the success of the by-election in Burma (April 1, 2012), in line with the strategy of "action for action", on April 4, 2012, Secretary of State H. Clinton declared the United States of America will take a series of measures to further improve relations with Burma, namely:

1. Seek recognition for a Resident Ambassador to Burma and establish a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) mission in its Embassy;
2. Support the resumption of normal activities of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP);
3. Allow private U.S. entities to send money to non-profit activities;
4. Facilitating travel to the United States for certain politicians and members of the National Assembly of Burma;
5. Begin the process of easing the export ban on financial services and investment "as part of a broader effort to help accelerate economic modernization and political reform" (Clinton, 2012).

Then, on May 17, 2012, the United States announced that it would suspend restrictions on investment by American companies and exports of U.S. financial services across all economic sectors including mining and natural resources in Burma. Secretary of State H. Clinton described the changes as "the most significant adjustments to our previous policy that have been made to date". The US government said it would work with all US investors in Burma to "ensure that we are promoting responsible investment and preventing abuses" and would pursue "the transparency, and through transparency, accountability for the activities of our companies". This will include the continued designation of Burmese individuals and entities involved in human rights abuses. Secretary of State H. Clinton also announced that the arms embargo against Burma will continue and that the current special representative of the United States Derek Mitchell will be appointed Permanent Ambassador of the United States to Burma.

At the end of 2012, President B. Obama became the first US President to visit Burma. This is the first important step in the process of re-establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. The US also lifted many investment and trade bans against Burma.

After Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy won the November 2015 parliamentary elections, the US allowed companies to do business in Myanmar's largest airports and ports.

The troubles and conflicts between the US and Burma are also related to religious conflicts in this country. Burma has not been able to solve the problem of armed conflicts among ethnic minorities, and in recent years religious conflicts have become more serious. Burma is a Buddhist country with 90% of the population being Buddhists, with the Muslim minority mixed with the majority Buddhists. In June 2012, in Rakhine state broke out violent conflict against the Muslim Rohingya, which quickly turned into bloody conflicts between Buddhists and Muslims throughout Burma. So far, more than 200 people have died, 140,000 people have lost their homes, most of which are Muslims (Nghien cuu Bien Dong). In Rakhine State, the Rohingya are forced to migrate, unable to cross the border and also unable to freely receive aid from international NGOs, their living conditions are extremely difficult. The Rohingya are a minority group of about 1 million people (2% of the population of Burma) who, despite having lived in the northern part of Burma (mainly in Rakhine state) for generations, are considered illegal immigration and denial of citizenship. They have been persecuted for decades by the Government and nationalists (Guardian, 2016)

Religious conflicts in Burma are considered complicated and difficult to resolve, and the government is afraid of opposition from a large number of Buddhists, so it does not dare to forcefully resolve it. During the early 2014, President Thein Sein's announcement that he would not recognize the nationality of the Rohingya, who had to register as "Bangladeshi" led to a conflict. However, the positions of the opposition and the Government on this issue are not much different, and Aung San Suu Kyi's vague avoidance has also been criticized. It can be said that increasing religious conflict is the price for democratization in Myanmar, an outbreak of people's resistance that has been accumulated for a long time. The complexity of solving the religious problem in Myanmar goes far beyond the armed problem among ethnic minority groups, and this will impede the process of democratic reform and stability in Burma. The US has repeatedly criticized the Burmese government over the Rohingya issue, seeing it as an ethnic cleansing. The US Congress has passed many resolutions, and officials from the US State Department and the US Ambassador to Burma have also visited areas such as Rakhine state many times. From the US point of view, the Myanmar government's crackdown on the Rohingya is a violation of human rights and must be stopped. While visiting Burma in April 2014, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and Pacific Affairs Daniel Russel expressed displeasure with the Burmese government's expulsion of organizations such as "Doctors Without Borders" (MSF) out of Rakhine state. In a speech in Malaysia on April 27, 2014, President B. Obama affirmed that "Burma's transformation will not be successful if Muslims are persecuted". In May 2014, Myanmar's National Assembly drafted a bill restricting marriage between people of different religions, causing a wave of criticism in the US, and the US State Department also expressed great concern about the incident. The US House of Representatives passed Resolution No. 418, demanding that the Government of Myanmar end discrimination against the Rohingya, respect human rights

for ethnic and religious minorities, and called on the US Government and the international community to continue to put pressure on Burma (H.Res, 2016). However, the Burmese government and people still believe that the Rohingya issue is a matter of Myanmar's sovereignty and politics, and the expulsion of the Rohingya is to protect the country's sovereignty and the status of Buddhism, against the involvement of external forces such as the US. It should be noted that the international image of the country's leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been tarnished by the defense of the 2017 military crackdown against Rohingya Muslims. The proof is that in 2019, Aung San Suu Kyi spoke out in defense of the persecution of the Rohingya at the International Court of Justice (Financial Times, 2021).

On September 14, 2016, Aung Sang Suu Kyi made a historic visit to the United States in her new capacity as State Counselor and Foreign Minister, a testament to the far-reaching changes Burma has undergone over the past few years: “Burma now has a democratically elected, civilian-led government focused on bringing peace and national reconciliation, economic prosperity and social welfare, while respecting the human rights of the people”. Building on this progress and working closely with the new government, President B. Obama has decided to make substantial adjustments to US policies to help State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi, the government and the Burmese people continue the process of political reform and economic growth based on foundation and prosperity. These changes include: ending a national emergency for Burma, restoring Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) benefits to Burma, establishing a US-Burma partnership, expand people-to-people ties, strengthen bilateral economic ties, continue working toward the Open Skies Treaty, and begin underwriting a new USAID loan portfolio.

Since 2012, the United States has provided nearly \$1.5 billion to support Burma's democratic transition and economic transformation, advance the peace process, and improve the lives of millions, including supporting communities affected by violence. More than 1.3 million people have improved food security and more than 400,000 poor farming families in Burma have increased their agricultural productivity with better access to technology, markets and investments. The United States also re-established the full USAID Mission in Burma in 2012. Prior to that, in 2008, USAID had been very supportive of the people of this country after suffering the devastation caused by Cyclone Nargis. Since the Rohingya emigration in 2017, the United States has contributed more than \$600 million to conduct humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya in both Bangladesh and for those remaining in Burma, and continues to provide assistance to other vulnerable populations in Kachin, Shan and elsewhere (U.S. Department of States, 2021).

Relations between the United States and Burma were strained again after the ouster of State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi in a military coup led by Min Aung Hlaing in February 2021. Accordingly, the US policy towards Burma has also changed. The United States condemned the coup and threatened to reimpose sanctions on Burma: “We will work with our partners throughout the region and around the world to support the restoration of a democratic sovereignty and the rule of law, and hold those responsible for upsetting Burma's democratic transition. US President Joe Biden announced sanctions against Burmese military leaders

such as imposing a freeze on assets related to the military regime and related individuals, imposing a ban on export of some Burmese businesses.

On March 12, 2021, US Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas assigned Burma to Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 18 months. This new designation allows Burmese citizens (and non-citizens permanently resident in Burma) currently residing in the United States to file an initial TPS application, provided they meet the requirements on eligibility: “Due to the military coup and the brutal violence of the security forces on civilians, the people of Burma are suffering from a complex and worsening humanitarian crisis in many parts of the region of the country”. “After scrutinizing this dire situation, I have designated Burma for Temporary Protected Status so that Burmese citizens and permanent residents can stay in the United States temporarily (U.S. Department of Security, 2021).

As Burma transitioned to democracy following the 2015 elections, the United States took concrete steps to promote broad-based economic growth and support political reform in the country. The United States played an important role in supporting new participation from multilateral development banks, which resumed operations in 2013. In 2016, the United States ended a national emergency for Burma, which has been in place since 1997 and removes a number of economic sanctions and other restrictions against Burma, including the designation of individuals and entities under the competent sanctions related to Burma (U.S. Department of States, 2021).

Due to the influence of political fluctuations, the economic and trade relations between the United States and Burma developed quite slowly. On May 21, 2013, the United States and Myanmar signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. However, after the coup in Burma in February 2021, the US side suspended exchange, meeting and cooperation activities with Burma under this agreement. Burma is currently the 85th largest commodity trading partner of the United States with \$1.4 billion in total merchandise trade (two-way) in 2020. Total merchandise exports reach \$339 million; Import turnover of goods reached 1.0 billion USD (Office of the United States Trade Representative, 2021).

Conclusion

Thus, it can be seen that the road to democracy in Burma is essentially still under the control of the military. The civilian government led by Aung San Suu Kyi, despite taking measures to concentrate power in their hands, the Burmese military forces still control important functions in the government, and in the hands of some (large and immutable) parliamentary seat in the National Assembly. Therefore, nearly a decade has passed in the process of escaping from the yoke of military dictatorship, the political development in Burma today can be said to be a mixture of democracy and dictatorship. Burma's entire road to a democratic country lies ahead with all its difficulties, challenges and uncertainties. Despite the efforts and implementation of strong sanctions in both political and economic aspects to promote democratization in Burma by many Presidents, the United States has not achieved its target. The religious conflicts persisted and

complicated, the "underground" domination of the military power culminated in the coup to overthrow the civilian government of Aung San Suu Kyi with a short existence and subsequent conflicts in Burma have shown that US policy and actions are not enough to make breakthroughs in democratization in this country.

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