

Doctoral Dissertation

**Changing Positions of Key Stakeholders in the Peace Process of  
Burma/Myanmar:  
To Overcome Key Barriers Impeding Peace and Development**

(Summary)

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This study investigates changing positions of the key stakeholders in the peace process of Burma/Myanmar to overcome key barriers impeding peace and development in the country. The root cause of the political problems is constitutional in nature since the 1947 Constitution lacked fair power-sharing mechanisms. This led to ethnic nationalities to take arms rather than demand for economic and material equity. The ethnic armed conflict in the country is not intrinsically “ethnic,” but rather an ethnic struggle against succeeding administrations. The root cause of the ethnic armed conflict are the unmet demands from ethnic nationalities for a “shared-rule,” which was promised to them upon joining the Union of Burma. The 1974 and 2008 Constitutions have granted the Tatmadaw (military) dual positions in politics and defense. The harsh and bungling direct military dictatorship from 1962 to 2010 resulted in the most protracted ethnic armed conflict in the world between the ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) and the Tatmadaw lasting for seven decades. The ethnic nationalities claim to fight for a combination of democratic principles of autonomy and power-sharing. In 2010, a hybrid civilian government was established, but the military remains to figure prominently. Hence, the three main barriers impeding peace and development in the country until today are a constitutional crisis, a negative civil-military relationship, and ethnic armed conflict.

It is in this context that this research aims to answer the following questions: what are the differences in the views of the government, the Tatmadaw, EAOs, and the political parties in the peace process of Burma/Myanmar? Are the relationships among the stakeholders changing? If so, how? The primary purpose of this research is to clarify the positions of the different stakeholders in the country in terms of the afore-mentioned barriers, to identify the conflict points and the common ground where the issues could be settled, and to suggest probable solutions. The originality of the research is grounded on key informant interviews of government officials, the Tatmadaw, ethnic nationalities, and other experts. The different positions of the stakeholders are

analyzed to clarify the dynamism of the interaction among the stakeholder in search of the political accommodation in the peace process.

A primary finding of the research is the lack of understanding regarding the positions of different stakeholders in the peace process and that of other parties, as well as the consequent absence of proper cooperation among them. Hence, a fair power-sharing approach (consociation by Arent Lijphart (1969, 1977, 1979, 1999, 2004)) and rights-based approach are suggested as a key to breaking barriers impeding peace and development in the country.

There are three significant issues among many others that all the stakeholders agree to cooperate on in amending the constitution. First, all the stakeholders, the government, the Tatmadaw, ethnic nationalities, and political parties wish to amend the provision relating to separation of power. They, in general, agree to reduce the percentage of the Tatmadaw representatives in the Hluttaw (Parliament) from the current proportion of 25% (Provision 436, 440 (110), 224 (56)). As the Constitution states, more than 75% of the votes in the Hluttaw are required to amend the constitution, thus, the Tatmadaw holds a key decision-making power. The other stakeholders wish to amend this to 75% of the elected members of parliament excluding the appointed Tatmadaw representatives. A provision on the appointment of Chief Minister for the State and Region is also required to be amended (Provision 261 (b)), from being appointed by the president to being elected by respective State and Region so that they can manage issues relating to local affairs, resource, and revenue management. The second is the issue of rights to secession, which has drawn three different positions and necessitate a compromise, as this issue is one of the significant gridlocks in the peace process. The government and the Tatmadaw wish to keep the provision as it is now (Provision 10), while ethnic nationalities wish to amend it through a political guarantee that none of the members will secede from the Union. Another position coming from some sectors of ethnic nationalities wishes to repeal the provision totally. The third and final

significant issue is the presidential electoral system. All the stakeholders desire to have only one vice president and bar a direct candidacy from the Tatmadaw.

The government has two constitutional amendment approaches. The first is through the Hluttaw, and the second is through the 21st Century Panglong Conference (21CPC) where the ethnic armed groups could participate in discussing political agenda. It is a matter of the genuine political will of the Tatmadaw that could hasten the constitution amendments. If there is a constitution that ensures fair power-sharing with democratic principles, the country's political problems could inch towards resolution.

While democratization is a nationwide core common goal, ethnic nationalities in Burma/Myanmar have further precise sine qua non: federalism and equal power-sharing. The ethnic nationalities have been resisting the succeeding governments for fair power-sharing and autonomy. Autonomy in ethnic nationalities' stance is to exercise direct management of affairs and issues that concern them while still cooperating with the central government for common interests. Myanmarization, or the forced cultural assimilation of the successive junta, is also one of the significant factors that ignited the conflict. Besides, it is also driven by the amalgamation of non-ethnic factors—usually driven by political- and resources-sharing.

In terms of civil-military relations, all the stakeholders agree that there should be one standing national army. The question about the role of the Tatmadaw is not whether it is political or apolitical, but how much power it holds and what kind of roles it should assume. Democratic civilian control is recommended: that the elected representatives of a given state or nation controls the military/armed forces. Objective civilian control should be applied to optimize civilian supremacy in controlling the whole power of a nation. The theory elaborates the idea to encourage 'an independent military sphere' so that officials of the military not only work professionally within the military's autonomy but also remain neutral actors in political affairs.

This study notes that further research on political systems suitable for the country is required. To break the barriers, proper interaction and cooperation between the stakeholders is necessary. A grand coalition among the executive leaders should be formed, and this body must hold the decision-making power in dealing with difficult agenda in the peace process. Until today, the Tatmadaw attempts to be the guardian of the national politics while being positioned outside the government, and structurally avoids the function of the duty-bearer. The National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government positioned itself as a mediator between the Tatmadaw and the EAOs instead of leading the peace process, and the EAOs have been vacillated in dealing with two parallel authorities in the peace process. For this reason, ethnic nationalities in Burma/Myanmar are skeptical about the effective cooperation between the NLD-led government and the Tatmadaw.

To effectively manage the peace process and constitutional amendment as well as the two channels of the Hluttaw and the 21CPC, this study proposes several steps that could lead to trust-building among the stakeholders. First, if the provisions for separation of power and equitable power-sharing are carried on, this could certainly provide relief in the process. This process can be done in the Hluttaw even if the peace negotiation in the 21CPC is halted. Hence, the keys to a faster peace process lie on a gradual amendment of the constitution from the most agreeable provisions, a gradual reduction of the Tatmadaw in Hluttaw, a collective leadership of the government, and proper cooperation among the executive leaders.

Second, since the EAOs and several political parties could not participate in the Hluttaw, the nationwide ceasefire agreement and the 21CPC should be maintained. A collective leadership of the government is vital to moderate the peace negotiation, especially when it comes to the agenda directly relating to the government's processes such as federalism and self-determination. Therefore, a decision-making power that resides in the government, the Tatmadaw, the EAOs and political executive leaders is indispensable in breaking gridlocks in the peace process.

For these two steps, a certain degree of trust is required, as the EAOs have been cautious with security sector reform since they had a bad experience in the past. The hope and trust that the ethnic nationalities have on the NLD-led government have not yet materialized, and the government is yet to prove its collective leadership in the peace process. In the end, the study contends that once the barriers to peace are overcome, the stakeholders could focus on other issues integral to peace and development of Burma/Myanmar.