

Understanding Reforms in Myanmar: Linking External and Internal Factors

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Introduction

After more than two decades under authoritarian rule, the past five years have witnessed profound changes in Myanmar's domestic politics. Albeit the flawed election in 2010, the newly elected government has symbolized the end of military regime and the restoration of civilian order. Furthermore, the new government has indicated its commitment to advance democratic transition by its progressive policies in liberalizing its economy and domestic press as well as reproaching the opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as the landmark step toward national reconciliation (Thuzar 2012). As the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marty Natalegawa, said after his visit to Myanmar, "Myanmar reform is irreversible" (Thuzar 2012).

In order to understand how these reforms have been taking place, this paper will examine both external and internal factors as indispensable parts of these reforms. This paper will specifically focus on how major powers and domestic leadership affect the dynamics of political changes in Myanmar which eventually lead to the current reforms. This paper argues that both major powers and domestic leadership have contributed significantly to the dynamics of political changes in Myanmar. The diverging interests and policies among major powers have resulted in different approaches toward the military regime. While the policies of one major power have weakened the policies of others, these policies in overall have complementary effects in the democratic transition of the country. The engagement policies of China, India and ASEAN, for instance, have been crucial for the survival of the country while sanctions and pressure from US

and other western countries have pushed the country forward to democratization. Likewise, different personal leaderships have resulted in different approach to democratization. A more conservative leader such as Than Shwe has succeeded in maintaining order and unity of the country, while the emergence of reformist leader, represented by Thein Sein, has advanced reform and democratization.

In order to better elaborate these arguments, this paper will be divided into several parts. The first part will provide the historical background on Myanmar's domestic politics since its independence to its current reform. The second part, then, will examine major powers' interests and policies in Myanmar and how these external factors affect the dynamics of political changes in Myanmar. The third part, in turn, will examine the internal factors emphasizing the role of domestic leadership in this reform. Based on these discussions, the last part will conclude the findings by looking ahead the anticipated consequences of the aforementioned factors on the future trajectories of Myanmar's democracy.

Historical Background

Nation building in Myanmar is perhaps the longest and the bloodiest compared to other countries in Southeast Asia. After gaining independence from Britain in January 4, 1948, Myanmar was torn into chaos under failed trial of multiparty parliamentary democracy in the first fourteen years. At the center, the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) as the previously independent movement "who inherited the state" was apparent to be ideologically heterogeneous and failed to reach agreement on how to run the newly independent Myanmar (T. Than 1993). In the grassroots level, situation was worsening as ethnic minorities such as Karen, Kachin, Mon, and Chin revolted against the government (T. Than 1993). This has not mentioned Muslim Majaheedin groups and communist elements who attempted to do similar actions (T. Than

1993). Under such circumstances, the government has, from the beginning, relied heavily on military intervention to appease these dissensions (T. Than 1993).

While the charisma of U Nu has succeeded in maintaining this fragile regime for the first decade, the 1960s has seen relentless public dissents and significant economic decline. U Nu's policy of installing Buddhism as state religion, followed by his resignation in early 1962 has exacerbated the situation even further (T. Than 1993). In order to prevent the state from disintegration, the Tatmadaw or Myanmar's arms forces who previously stayed in the peripheries to halt the flow of Kuomintang refugees in the northern border has moved to the center and taken over the government under the name of Revolutionary Council (RC) (T. Than 1993). The Tatmadaw has learnt that its task was no longer promoting freedom and democracy as it did under British rule, but instead, maintaining peace and the rule of Law (T. Than 1993).

Under the constitutional military regime of General Ne Win, the RC has redirected the trajectory of the state from chaotic democracy to the so-called Burmese Way of Socialism (BWS) and renamed the state as the Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma (T. Than 1993). In order to maintain domestic order, the regime has cut off the relations with other states and focused on building socialism under one party system. These two elements, nationalism and domestic order, are key elements in understanding military rule in Myanmar and have characterized most of the subsequent development in its path to democratization. The ratification of new constitution and the general election in 1974 were evidences that Military were not merely struggling for power, but instead, restoring order within the state.

The miscalculation of RC, however, was the impact of isolationist policy which has cut over half of Myanmar's export and weakened the already sluggish domestic economy. This,

together with the wave of democratization around the globe, has sparked public outrage and pro-democratic movements in 1988 which have dictated the Tatmadaw to take back the government under its direct control. Acting as the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the Tatmadaw aimed to restore order and to organize another election in the immediate future (T. Than 1993). Nevertheless, when the election was absolutely won by the opposition party, namely, National League for Democracy (NLD) led by Aung San Suu Kyi, the SLORC refused to transfer the power for obscure reason and instead, announced a national convention for amending the constitution (Taylor 1991). One senior government official testified that SLORC had no trust in Aung San Suu Kyi due to her close relations with the west and ethnic minority insurgents (Hlaing 2012).

This SLORC's action has provoked condemnation from international community which demanded the transfer of power and the release of political detainees including the opposition leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who has been under arrest since 1989. United States, United Kingdom and their close allies have imposed sanctions in terms of "arms embargo", "assets freeze" and "visa ban" on the high official of SLORC (Holliday 2005). This international pressure has been exacerbated by domestic protests where various opposing parties were unified under the banner of United National League for Democracy (UNLD) to oppose the junta (Taylor 1991). Instead of responding to these grievances, SLORC under its new chairman, General Than Shwe, has suppressed the opposition parties and persisted with its own way to democracy. Myanmar turned to its neighboring countries such as China, India, and ASEAN which seemed to prefer soft approach to Myanmar amidst western sanction. It is these countries which provide Myanmar with economic and political supports during this transition.

Notwithstanding many cases of human rights violations and repressive approach of governance, SLORC has indeed paved incremental transition to democracy in 1997 when it joined ASEAN and renamed itself as State Peace and Democratic Council (SPDC) (McCarthy 2008). Apart from Depayin incident in 2003 where pro-military party attacked Suu Kyi and her NLD members, the new Prime Minister Khin Nyunt declared his “seven-point roadmap toward disciplined democracy” which basically outlined the country’s short-term blueprint for holding national convention, drafting constitution, conducting referendum and general election (McCarthy 2008).

A series of catastrophes in 2007-2008 has accelerated this process. The continuing government repression, widespread cases of corruption, economic downturn and sudden rise of oil prices have together mobilized various parties such as pro-Aung San Suu Kyi party, “the 88 Generation Student organization”, and human rights activists to conduct demonstration across the country (Myoe and Thawnghmung 2008). These sporadic events have climaxed when 10,000 Buddhist monks joined the masses in September and were brutally suppressed by the government, killing 31 people and detaining 4000 others (Myoe and Thawnghmung 2008). Nothing could be expected except mounting international pressures not only from western countries but also from Myanmar’s close neighbors whom the country previously relied on. The worst Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar history which struck the country in the following year has further exacerbated the domestic situation. The response from Myanmar’s government was maintaining its seven roadmap plan. The drafting of the new constitution was finished by the end of 2007 while the referendum was conducted shortly after the Nargis (Myoe and Thawnghmung 2008). In 2010, the government ran the election which was unsurprisingly won by the pro-military party, Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) (Turnell 2011). Many have been skeptic with the

change might be brought by the transfer of power from Than Shwe to the newly-elected President Thein Sein considering the unfair practices during the election, the exclusion of the NLD, and the reservation of 25% Parliamentary seats for the members of military (Turnell, Myanmar in 2010 2011).

The first two years of Thein Sein government, however, have marked profound changes in Myanmar government. Shortly after his inauguration in March 30, 2011, Thein Sein has met with Aung San Suu Kyi and invited her in the discussion of economic reform in the country (Turnell 2012). Later on this year, Thein Sein has proved his commitment to put forward the voice of the people when he postponed the dam project with China which potentially “displacing tens of thousands of people” and damaging area as large as Singapore territory (Turnell 2012). He has also fulfilled the promise of releasing 6000 political detainees, a number which is beyond the expectation of many observers (Turnell 2012). Responding to this progressive development, many countries have revoked their sanctions and resumed bilateral relations with the country (Holliday 2013). The most notable was the appointment of US ambassador to Myanmar and followed by President Obama’s visit which became the first visit by US president in history (Holliday 2013).

Major Power and Political Change

The above elaboration has demonstrated how international influences, notably from major powers such as China, India, ASEAN and United States have played significant roles in the political changes in Myanmar. This section will further examine the diverging policies among these major powers, the motives behind these policies and how these policies, in spite of their differences, have together contributed to political changes in Myanmar.

China

China is the closest ally of Myanmar during the military regime. Under the pragmatic leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China has abandoned its backing to Burma Communist Party (BCP) which has long been an impediment in their bilateral relations, and instead, reengaged with the new Myanmar's government under SLORC (T. M. Than 2003). Since resuming this bilateral relations, China's trading with Myanmar has grown from 9.6 times from 1990 to 2006 making China as Myanmar's fifth biggest export destination and the first source of import (Kudo 2008). China has also been the main source of foreign direct investment in Myanmar particularly in energy and infrastructure (Bert 2004).

China's main motivation behind this policy is unquestionably economic in nature. The fast growing China's economy requires hydrocarbon, natural resources, and market which all possessed by Myanmar. Myanmar is the ten largest natural gas suppliers in the world, one of the main timber suppliers for southern China and is the second largest country in Southeast Asia which would be potential market for Chinese products (Chenyang and Fook 2009). The strategic location of Myanmar has also served as a bridge not only to the Chinese biggest market in the South, that is, the emerging Southeast Asian Countries, but also to the Indian Ocean. Access to Indian Ocean is particularly important for China as an alternative route for oil imports from the Middle East and Africa which currently traverse through perilous Malacca and South China Sea route. Access to Indian ocean has also strategic value for China in its effort to shift from one-ocean dependence in the east coast which has been encircled by US allies toward "two-ocean strategy" which provide more "spatial relations to the world" (Chenyang 2010). On top of this, China has the interest in cooperating with Myanmar in order to stabilize its southern borders

which has long been prone to ethnic minorities' insurgencies and transnational crime (Chenyang 2010).

China's pragmatic approach to Myanmar, however, does not necessarily mean that China has abandoned the need for democratization. China indeed has the interest in a stable and democratic Myanmar. Yet, contrast to the west, China believes that military regime is the most viable option to create this stability in the chaotic post-independent Myanmar (Chenyang and Fook 2009). Imposing sanction, in China's view, will only destabilize the country which would impact to the security of China as the neighboring country (Chenyang and Fook 2009). Therefore, China prefer to engage the military leaders in Myanmar, and in so doing, China always emphasizes the five principles of "mutual respect, mutual non-aggression, non-interference, mutual equality, and peaceful coexistence" based on the understanding of the high nationalism and xenophobia among many of the Myanmar leaders (T. M. Than 2003) (Chenyang and Fook 2009). This approach has proven to be successful in building the trust of the regime to China as can be seen, for instance, in China's advice to the regime to accept US aid after the Nargis as well as China's mediation role in the talk between US and Myanmar after the Saffron revolution (Chenyang and Fook 2009).

India

India's policy toward Myanmar has been seemingly dubious between the moral value of being a democratic country and its pragmatic approach of pursuing its own interests. As a democratic country, India has strongly opposed the takeover of the government by military regime in 1962 and pushed Myanmar to return to civilian rule. India was further infuriated by the nationalization policy of the regime which has forced 200,000 Indians fled back to the country (Egreteau 2008).

As a result, India provided economic and political support to the pro-democratic movements in Myanmar as well as the ethnic insurgents in the Myanmar side of the border which has provoked retaliatory actions from the military regime (Egretau 2008).

The rising tension between India and Myanmar, however, lasted for less than five years as India announced its “Look East Policy” in 1993 in which engaging with Myanmar is one of the most important elements. Contrast to China, the shift in Indian foreign policy toward Myanmar has been based mostly on the strategic consideration. The first and foremost is to contain China’s influence in Myanmar which has increased dramatically since early 1990s. India has long perceived China as its competitor in its power projection in Asia. The fall of Tibet as the buffer state between the two powers which led to the outbreak of Sino-Indian War in 1962 has raised the tension between the two countries (Malik 1994). For this reason, India aimed to avoid the “Tibetization of Myanmar” which would further undermine Indian security particularly when China eventually has access to the Indian Ocean (Malik 1994). In addition to this calculation, India has now seen a more benefit by cooperating with the central government in Myanmar as the minorities in the northwest borders have signed ceasefire agreements with the junta. Rather than provoking actions which could destabilize the border area, Myanmar preferred to cooperate with the Junta as can be seen in the “Operation Golden Bird” to wipe out the remaining active arms groups in their shared borders (Egretau 2008) (Nardi 2008). The rise of the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership in India since 1998 has added significant economic dimension which previously less overt due to Indian dilemma as a democratic country cooperating with authoritarian regime. The more pragmatic BJP has substantiated the bilateral cooperation between the two countries as proven in the higher level meeting and increasing trade volume from merely \$87.4 million in 1990 to \$557.67 in 2005 (Nardi 2008). India’s thirst of

energy, natural resources, and market has also given the impetus for deepening economic cooperation with Myanmar as in the case of Mekong-Gangga Cooperation (MGC).

India's focus on competing with China and its dubious policy toward Myanmar have made it less influential in Myanmar's democratization process despite the fact that India shared the interests of a more democratic and liberal Myanmar. India's role, in this sense, can be inferred from its hardline policy against the military regime in the late 1980s, its joint effort to maintain the unity of Myanmar through cooperation in the border area, and its economic cooperation which not only crucial for the survival of the country but also for moderating Chinese influence in Myanmar.

ASEAN

Similar to China and India, ASEAN has preferred to engage the military regime in Myanmar through a soft approach. ASEAN, however, seemed to play a greater role in that the Association has not only provided economic support for the survival of the country but also continuous pressure for democratization. ASEAN's role has appeared for the first time when the military refused to transfer the power to the winning party which prompted this regional organization to discuss the issue at the 24th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting 1991 (Davies 2012). This meeting has agreed on "constructive engagement" approach to Myanmar based on the belief that promoting diplomatic, economic and political cooperation with an authoritarian state would lead to democratization (McCarthy 2008). Apart from the moral belief, the decision to engage Myanmar in such a way was also based on the political calculation of each ASEAN member states. Thailand and Singapore, for example, had the interest in taking benefit from the opening up of Myanmar's market while Indonesia and Malaysia concerned on the expulsion of hundreds of

thousands of Muslim Rohingya (McCarthy 2008). The interests of member states together with international pressures have shaped ASEAN policy toward Myanmar from this point onward.

As the realization of constructive engagement approach, ASEAN invited Myanmar to join its meeting in 1994, and upon the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, offered observer status within ASEAN (McCarthy 2008). Albeit international pressure, ASEAN has also accepted Myanmar as a full member state of the Association in 1997. The admission of Myanmar as part of ASEAN has created unique dynamics for both parties, ASEAN and Myanmar. In regards to ASEAN, Myanmar membership has improved the maturity of the organization in dealing with internal issues of member states. After the rejection of “flexible engagement” proposed by Surin Pitsuwan, ASEAN has at least modified the “non-interference approach” to “enhanced interaction” in anticipating the deteriorating situation in Myanmar (Haacke 2005). This approach has enabled individual member states, not ASEAN as a unity, to publicly comment on the internal issues of other member which has regional impact (Haacke 2005). For the part of Myanmar, its membership and the peer pressure from ASEAN countries have helped the country on track of its democratization. The Depayin incident in 2003, for instance, has been a setback in Myanmar’s democratization and has embarrassed ASEAN credibility which has convinced international community on the merit of its soft approach. After western countries increased their sanctions to Myanmar, Mahathir Mohammad also threatened to dismiss Myanmar’s membership (Katanyuu 2006) (Haacke 2005). Thailand who feared the destabilizing impact of this expulsion offered assistance for Myanmar a step-by-step democratization under the framework of the so-called Bangkok Process (McCarthy 2008). As a result, Myanmar Prime Minister Kint Nyunt released its own roadmap to democracy as the first of five steps of the Bangkok Process. The breakout of Saffron Revolution in 2007 has been another example of constructive role by

ASEAN. Under the Singapore chairmanship, ASEAN issued strong statement rebuking the suppressive policy of the junta. ASEAN also urged Myanmar to accept mediation offered by the UN, to release political detainees and to maintain “peaceful transition to democracy” (Haacke 2008). During the Cyclone Nargis in 2008, ASEAN has also played key role in persuading the junta to permit foreign aid workers to enter Myanmar.

ASEAN’s role, however, is not without flaw. While ASEAN has been proactive in pushing Myanmar forward to democracy, diverging interests among member states have hindered ASEAN to perform its best role. Despite both Singapore and Malaysia aim to boost their influence in regional affairs, their economic interests in Myanmar have constrained them to pursue harder stance (Haacke 2008). Other members such as Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam were overshadowed by their concern that allowing intervention in Myanmar might lead to similar action to their countries (Haacke 2008). In the one hand, this approach has undermined ASEAN ability to assert its demand to Myanmar. On the other hand, the soft approach result emanating from this division has been one of the reasons Myanmar could sit comfortably within ASEAN. If only ASEAN took a tougher stance, Myanmar might retreat to its isolationist or swing closer to China.

United States

Contrast to the previous three parties, United States has been, from the beginning, condemning the repressive military regime in Myanmar and pushing hard for democratization in the country. US efforts to promote democratization in Myanmar were manifested in the direct approach as in the case of sanctions and indirect approach through pressure to ASEAN.

The first US sanction was imposed in 1988 as the military took over the government. US halted all of its assistances to the country. As the military refused to transfer the power to the winning party in the 1990 election and re-arrested the opposition leader in 1996, the US has increased the sanction by banning new investment and restricting visas for junta members (Bert 2004) (Steinberg 2010). The Depayin incident in 2003 has further provoked sterner sanction from the US which issued “Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act” in the forms of freezing assets as well as prohibiting import and financial transaction (Seekins 2005). The crackdown during Saffron revolution has added another sanction on “jade and rubies” import and prohibition on any funding to other parties investing in Myanmar (Steinberg 2010).

US sanctions in overall have been widely criticized as ineffective considering it is unilateral in nature. Other Myanmar’s main trading partners such as China, ASEAN and India maintained close relations with Myanmar and even benefited from the vacuum left by US and other western countries. The 2003 sanction has perfectly illustrated this problem. After US issuing import prohibition which hurt Myanmar as much as \$350 million, China offered \$200 million package of assistance to Myanmar (Holliday 2005). This has not mentioned aid from India and economic benefit from trading with other countries. Import ban was also being criticized of hurting the poor people rather than the regime because most of Myanmar’s export to US is textile (Seekins 2005) (James 2004).

This flawed sanction, however, does not necessarily mean that US has failed to influence democratization in Myanmar. In addition to sanction, the US has pursued alternative approach by actively pushing ASEAN to put pressure on Myanmar. In 1997, US insisted ASEAN not to admit Myanmar as member state and dissuade Myanmar’s participation in ASEM meeting (Katanyuu 2006). US has also been successful in pushing ASEAN not to grant the 2006

chairmanship to Myanmar. Doing so will provide opportunity for Myanmar to host a series of international forum which implies that participating countries acknowledge the military regime in Myanmar (Katanyuu 2006). Therefore, US and EU have boycotted some meetings with ASEAN in order to show their seriousness about their demand (Katanyuu 2006). Myanmar, eventually, gave up their candidacy as the chairman in 2006.

As Barack Obama became US president in 2008, he initiated a new approach toward Myanmar named as “pragmatic engagement”. The shift from hard policy of sanction to engagement has been part of his broader policy of rebalancing to Asia. As Pricilla Clapp has noted, this change is the result of tough debate within the US about the efficacy of sanction and increasing voices to balance the sanction with ‘engagement’ (Clapp 2010). Despite the regime initially cautious about this changing approach, both parties at least have the same interests of balancing the influence of China in Myanmar. Not surprisingly, the last two years have witnessed the advancement of democratization in Myanmar and warming bilateral relations between the two countries with Obama, for the first time, visited the country.

Domestic Leadership and Political Change

International pressure, particularly from major powers, has proven to be major contributor in the political changes in Myanmar as explained above. The soft approach preferred by China, India and ASEAN has been crucial in maintaining the survival of Myanmar during the period of western sanction, thereby enabling conducive environment for democratization. The sanction from the US, despite its effectiveness being undermined by the countries who prefer soft approach, has contributed in pushing hard the country to made progress in its democratization. Yet, ultimately, it is domestic politics which determine what, when and how to reform. In an

authoritarian regime, domestic leader has been among the most influential in this reform with Myanmar is no exception.

Since its independence, Myanmar has relied on the personal leadership in its government. The assassination of the charismatic General Aung San has left the country divided into chaotic state. U Nu and General Ne Win, despite their failure in the end, have proven to manage the country for a relatively long period. Even in the opposition party, Aung San Suu Kyi has played indispensable role in the survival of the party and democratization in Myanmar. This section will focus on the changes of leadership and how it affects the democratization in Myanmar.

The advent of military regime after 1990 election was concurrent with the power transition in military leadership from Senior General Saw Maung to Senior General Than Shwe who will lead the country for almost two decades. Than Shwe was known as a conservative senior in the Tatmadaw who has the ambition to be the “paramount leader” of Myanmar (Hlaing 2012). Than Shwe has preserved his position by eliminating more senior officials and placed his proponents in strategic positions within the regime (Hlaing 2012). As Kyaw Yin Hlaing has noted from his interview with senior government official in Myanmar, there has been unwritten “m rules” in which his juniors would better follow under Than Shwe, namely “ma-lote” (avoiding doing anything that offend Than Shwe), “ma-shote” (stringently obeying Than Shwe’s command), and “ma-pyoke” (avoiding being fired) (Hlaing 2012).

This organizational culture developed under the leadership of Than Shwe has resulted in suppressive and isolationist regime of Myanmar for most of the 1990s. His personal antipathy toward Aung San Suu Kyi has made the relations between them irreconcilable. Against his failure of persuading Suu Kyi to support his government, he used the term “ka-la-ma-yar” or

“derogatory phrase for the wife of foreigner, especially Westerner or Indian” to call her (Hlaing 2012). The appointment of Khin Nyunt as prime minister has moderated the foreign policy of Myanmar. Khin Nyunt has long served as officer for foreign affairs who, through the experience of dealing with other countries, became moderate and liberal compare to his other fellows (Hlaing 2012). Khin Nyunt has been the one who involved in a secret talk with Aung San Suu Kyi in 2001 and the one who declared the seven-point roadmap to a disciplined democracy in 2003 (McCarthy 2008). He was, however, being replaced soon by General Soe Win who was close colleague with Than Shwe and was alleged to be the actor behind Depayin incident (McCarthy 2008). This changing leadership has reversed the development which has been made by Khin Nyunt. Myanmar has returned to hardline foreign policy as it refused to talk with UN delegation and brutally suppressed demonstrators during the Saffron revolution in 2007.

After the election in 2010 where Than Shwe has eventually given up his power to the elected president Thein Sein, the hope for transition to democracy has reemerged. Born from poor farmer family, Thein Sein has characterized himself more as reformist and nationalist rather than conservative leader (Callahan 2012). Soon after his inauguration, he met with Aung San Suu Kyi, renovated her old house, granted visas for her sons and invited her in the discussion of economic reform of the country (Hlaing 2012). He has been undertaking progressive policies in integrating Myanmar economy into the global markets, liberalizing domestic press, allowing the establishment of trade union, and the most important, establishing national human rights commission (Thuzar 2012). In order to ensure the solidity of this reformist movement, Thein Sein has reshuffled his cabinet, removing the conservative members including Vice President Tin Aung Myint Oo, appointing moderate officers, and for the first time, appointing female minister (Holliday 2013).

Conclusion

The recent reforms in Myanmar have been the result of a long process of political changes which involved many actors and interests. This paper has discussed in length the role of major powers and domestic leadership in the dynamics of political changes in Myanmar. It is apparent that although major powers have selfishly competed with each other over their interests in Myanmar, their policies after all have complementary effects in the survival and democratization of Myanmar. The different domestic leaders have also colored the democratization process in Myanmar. A tough leadership under Than Shwe has been important in maintaining unity and order within Myanmar, yet after such a long period, Myanmar is ready for changes and thus the emergence of reformist leader as Thein Sein is fresh air for the democratization in that country.

Apart from the positive contribution made by major powers and domestic leaders in the political changes in Myanmar, the reliance on both actors, particularly the latter, might not be desirable for sustaining Myanmar's democracy. In regards to the first, Myanmar has to maintain its agency role against the competition among major power in its country. Close cooperation with ASEAN which has proven to be its main supporter in democratization would help Myanmar to increase its bargaining position vis a vis major powers. In regards to the later, the reliance on personal leadership, which in current context, Thein Sein and Aung San Suu Kyi, might lead to the question on the sustainability of democratization in Myanmar when both leaders are no longer in leadership positions. Therefore, reforms in Myanmar should also emphasize greater participation from many elements, and thus allowing new reformist leaders blooming in Myanmar to solidify the democratization process.

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