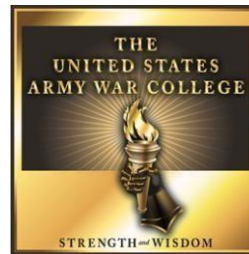


Myanmar in the Balance: Strategic Recalibration of Military Engagement

by

Lieutenant Colonel William E. Boswell
United States Army



United States Army War College
Class of 2015

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: A

Approved for Public Release
Distribution is Unlimited

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved--OMB No. 0704-0188

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. **PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-04-2015		2. REPORT TYPE STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Myanmar in the Balance: Strategic Recalibration of Military Engagement				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Lieutenant Colonel William E. Boswell United States Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel P. Michael Phillips Department of National Security and Strategy				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College, 122 Forbes Avenue, Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution A: Approved for Public Release. Distribution is Unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Word Count: 5195					
14. ABSTRACT The United States' decision to strategically rebalance its international efforts toward the Asia-Pacific region signaled a shift in its geopolitical interests. Reengaging Myanmar is an essential element of this rebalance because of its physical location and historical ties to China, India, and Japan. This geopolitically relevant country shares land borders China, India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Laos and has an extensive natural border along the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar's peaceful transfer of power from military rule has been gradual but slow. Thus, Washington has adopted an incremental approach to engagement activities. These activities aim to be proportional to the pace of Myanmar's internal reform. As a result, bilateral relations have gradually become stronger. Nonetheless, as many of Myanmar's promised reforms remain unfulfilled, the current U.S. policy regarding military engagement should be evaluated and recalibrated. This paper will describe the geopolitical importance of Myanmar, provide a brief history of foreign relations, outline issues with the current engagement policy, discuss military engagement policy options, and prescribe a limited military engagement option that underscores U.S. values while strengthening strategic rebalance posture.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Foreign Policy, Rebalance					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 30	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UU	b. ABSTRACT UU	c. THIS PAGE UU			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (w/ area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

Myanmar in the Balance: Strategic Recalibration of Military Engagement

by

Lieutenant Colonel William E. Boswell
United States Army

Colonel P. Michael Phillips
Department of National Security and Strategy
Project Adviser

This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The U.S. Army War College is accredited by the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, 3624 Market Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, (215) 662-5606. The Commission on Higher Education is an institutional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.

The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the United States Government.

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

Abstract

Title: Myanmar in the Balance: Strategic Recalibration of Military Engagement

Report Date: 01 April 2015

Page Count: 30

Word Count: 5195

Key Terms: Foreign Policy, Rebalance

Classification: Unclassified

The United States' decision to strategically rebalance its international efforts toward the Asia-Pacific region signaled a shift in its geopolitical interests. Reengaging Myanmar is an essential element of this rebalance because of its physical location and historical ties to China, India, and Japan. This geopolitically relevant country shares land borders with China, India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Laos and has an extensive natural border along the Bay of Bengal. Myanmar's peaceful transfer of power from military rule has been gradual but slow. Thus, Washington has adopted an incremental approach to engagement activities. These activities aim to be proportional to the pace of Myanmar's internal reform. As a result, bilateral relations have gradually become stronger. Nonetheless, as many of Myanmar's promised reforms remain unfulfilled, the current U.S. policy regarding military engagement should be evaluated and recalibrated. This paper will describe the geopolitical importance of Myanmar, provide a brief history of foreign relations, outline issues with the current engagement policy, discuss military engagement policy options, and prescribe a limited military engagement option that underscores U.S. values while strengthening strategic rebalance posture.

Myanmar in the Balance: Strategic Recalibration of Military Engagement

The United States' decision to strategically rebalance its international efforts toward the Asia-Pacific region signaled a shift in its geopolitical interests. Reengaging Myanmar is an essential element of this rebalance because of its physical location and historical ties to China, India, and Japan. This geopolitically important country shares land borders with China, India, Bangladesh, Thailand and Laos and has an extensive natural border along the Bay of Bengal. Washington's reengagement with Myanmar comes at a time when this Southeast Asian nation is undergoing significant internal political and military reform after nearly half a century of military rule. Myanmar's peaceful transfer of power and attendant democratic and human rights reform initiatives have been gradual but slow. Thus, Washington has adopted an incremental approach to engagement activities. These activities aim to be proportional to the pace of Myanmar's internal reform. As a result, bilateral relations have gradually become stronger. Nonetheless, as many of Myanmar's promised reforms remain unfulfilled, the current U.S. policy regarding military engagement should be evaluated and recalibrated. This paper will describe the geopolitical importance of Myanmar, provide a brief history of foreign relations, outline issues with Washington's current engagement policy, discuss military engagement policy options, and prescribe a limited military engagement option that underscores U.S. values while strengthening strategic rebalance posture.

Why Myanmar Matters

Myanmar is important to the U.S. because of its proximity to and relationship with China. This geopolitical reality was a central factor in Washington's decision to reengage Myanmar after twenty years of diplomatic isolation. Bordered by the Indian Ocean and China's Yunnan Province, Myanmar's commanding access to the Strait of

Malacca makes it pivotal to Washington's Asia policy. Strengthening the U.S.-Myanmar relationship is essential to balancing regional strategic interests, especially with regard to China, India, and Japan.¹

Myanmar has been important to these powerful Asian nations even before its independence in 1948. That said, the geopolitical dynamics for Myanmar, China, and India have evolved since the end of WWII. While India and China possess nuclear weapons, dynamic economies, and assertive foreign policies, Myanmar is just emerging from decades of military rule and internal strife. Washington intends the current influx of foreign assistance and engagement to influence the fledgling democracy. Other interests include Myanmar's abundant natural resources, such as hydrocarbons, minerals, precious stones, timber and fish. Thousands of ancient temples and other historic sites also contribute to its expanding tourism market. However, offshore drilling blocks in Myanmar's extensive gas fields are arguably the most valued among its commodities. As such, intense competition among oil companies is testing the strength of Myanmar's economic and political relationships with the U.S., China, India, and Japan.²

In spite of its relative weakness, Myanmar plays role in balancing the ambitions of more powerful states. It was once part of British India and maintains a significant Indian diaspora as well as deep religious and cultural ties. China also maintains a large diaspora and shares cultural ties. Both of these countries actively compete for access to Myanmar's natural resources through seaport and gas pipeline projects.³ China and, to a lesser extent, India have been able to affect Myanmar's policies for the past 20 years.

However, recent reforms have enabled Myanmar to affect policies of China, India, the U.S. and Japan.

Although Beijing has been steadily consolidating power, its primary concern appears to be internal regime stability followed by economic expansion and regional hegemony. Chinese efforts to expand its influence include aggressively pursuing territorial claims in the South and East China Seas in order to prevent containment and assert its role as the dominant power in Asia. By modernizing its navy and massive commercial fleet, China leverages vitally important sea lanes to expand its economic markets. China's handling of South China Sea claimant issues and increased access to the Indian Ocean is part of its String of Pearls approach. This approach has expanded China's commercial and naval presence at ports throughout the Indian Ocean, including Great Coco Island, Myanmar, Chittagong, Bangladesh, Hambantota, Sri Lanka and Gwadar, Pakistan. Although Myanmar's location provides China a means to project influence within the Indian Ocean littoral, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is unlikely to establish permanent bases in Myanmar so long as Chinese businesses can maintain access to Myanmar's natural resources and its seaports. Because Chinese contractors maintain some of their country's key port facilities, Myanmar remains somewhat beholden to China for spare parts and support. China might also use this technical assistance to expand its influence within ASEAN.

China's relations with Myanmar form a critical component in Beijing's effort to counterbalance U.S. and Indian influence and maintain strategic situational awareness. With regard to energy security, China has pipelines through Myanmar and also has plans to build a canal across Thailand's Isthmus of Kra. If built, this canal would provide

a more direct means of transporting oil and gas to meet China's energy needs by avoiding the Malacca Strait.⁴ If needs be, the Chinese could also use the canal to project forces to limit international access to the Malacca Strait and the South China Sea. The canal project, however, would take many years to develop. Until that time, India will continue to enjoy its strategic maritime advantage in the Bay of Bengal.⁵

To demonstrate its maritime interests and counter Indian and U.S. naval influence, China has increased its own naval presence in the Bay of Bengal through routine visits to Myanmar's ports.⁶ China will likely continue to provide technical and materiel support to Myanmar's ports in order to guarantee routine access to oil and gas pipelines connecting China's landlocked Yunnan province such as the Yunnan-Yangon-Irrawaddy corridor. However, these supply routes could also readily provide logistical support to PLAN forces operating in the Bay of Bengal, including those monitoring Indian naval activity and missile tests.⁷

Responding to Myanmar's domestic political reforms and concerns about rising Chinese influence, India, along with the U.S. and Japan, also implemented a more aggressive engagement strategy with Myanmar. An immediate neighbor, four of India's six remote Northeastern states -- Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, and Arunachal Pradesh -- border Myanmar. Arunachal Pradesh presents a particular concern for India because Beijing disputes Delhi's claim to much of that remote state's territory.⁸ Because India's Northeast is also known for geographical inaccessibility, insurgencies, and underdevelopment, improved cross-border relations with Myanmar could also improve Delhi's access to and governance within these troubled states. As part of India's Look East policy, this access could increase Myanmar's export market to India and increase

the flow of Indian manufactured goods to Myanmar and further east into mainland Southeast Asia. Similar to China, India also desires more efficient overland routes through Myanmar in order to supply its northeastern security forces. This could improve bilateral security cooperation and benefit both nations' internal security programs. Myanmar's waters are also important because India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands are geographically closer to Myanmar than to mainland India. Improved maritime cooperation with Myanmar would enhance Indian sea power projection and check China's regional ambitions. Because bilateral relations are improving, these designs may come to fruition. For example, Myanmar demonstrated a measure of trust toward India during the aftermath of 2008's Cyclone Nargis when it permitted Indian military doctors (and no other nations') to undertake relief efforts inside its borders.⁹ The U.S. has been at a disadvantage in Myanmar since it self-imposed sanctions. An example of this is when Myanmar denied U.S. access to its ports even when offering humanitarian assistance during the devastating aftermath of Cyclone Nargis.¹⁰ This episode signaled that protecting U.S. interests in the Bay of Bengal depended upon improving relations with Myanmar.

History of U.S. Relations with Myanmar

The military has ruled Myanmar since 1962, when General Ne Win implemented the "Burmese Way to Socialism" after ousting Prime Minister U Nu in a coup. Ne Win's Socialist Programme Party emerged as the only political party, which did nothing to improve the country's ambiguous relationship with the U.S. He nationalized the economy, banned press freedoms, and, at times, imposed harsh anti-Chinese and anti-ethnic group policies. After Ne Win's resignation as party leader in 1988, a period of civil unrest led to General Saw Maung's brutal coup and installation of the State Law and

Order Restoration Council (SLORC) in 1988. In response to the coup and subsequent human rights violations, the U.S. imposed long-term commercial and economic sanctions. In turn, the sanctions led Maung to seek expanded relations with China. Initially, India also took a hard stand against Myanmar's military rulers and supported pro-democracy groups. But by the mid-1990s, however, Delhi's policy became more conciliatory out of concerns for Beijing's growing influence.¹¹

Renewed U.S. relations with Myanmar were necessary because sanctions ultimately failed to isolate and weaken Myanmar's military junta and the U.S. needed a different approach to achieve strategic goals in the region.¹² Sanctions were largely ineffective because extensive Chinese military assistance and favorable Indian cooperation enabled Myanmar's regime to hold on to power.¹³ Myanmar's military rulers decided to meaningfully engage with the U.S. after they became concerned with China's rising influence in their country.¹⁴ Myanmar's initial reform announcement came in the form of its 2003 "Roadmap to Discipline-flourishing Democracy," and was followed by a constitutional referendum in 2008 and democratic elections in 2010, resulting in the release of the dissident Aung San Suu Kyi later that year. Myanmar's presently quasi-civilian government has undertaken numerous political and economic reforms since its highly orchestrated election, where former General Thein Sein was elected as President and his Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) won the majority of seats in the upper and lower houses, which was not surprising as the 2008 constitution guaranteed the military a 25% quota in the legislature. The military's high representation in the legislature remains an issue for the U.S. as it is inconsistent with democratic values. In 2012, parliamentary by-elections were held and opposition leader Aung San

Suu Kyi and her National League for Democracy (NLD) party won 11 percent of the seats. President Obama also visited Myanmar in 2012 and 2014 and President Thein Sein visited President Obama in Washington in 2013. The U.S. has not yet lifted all sanctions due to concerns about governance and human rights issues.

Sanctions did not mean the U.S had terminated all economic activity with military regime after 1988. The one exception was Chevron's joint venture for the construction of a pipeline linking Myanmar's Yadana gas field with Thailand. Even that became something of an embarrassment for Washington because of alleged human rights abuses traced to Myanmar's security forces assisting with the project.¹⁵ Because of this case and many other accusations of human rights violations, the U.S. reengagement approach has been cautious. Although the U.S. now has access to many of Myanmar's natural resources that were inaccessible for over two decades, its approach has been incremental and predicated upon democratization efforts. There are still risks to this reengagement strategy, specifically with regard to stagnation of important reforms that compromise U.S. democratic values. The U.S. remains concerned about the government's limited efforts to change the political-military landscape and suppression of ethnic minorities. Myanmar's rulers do not seem to share the U.S.'s sense of urgency with regard to timely reform. However, it appears to share U.S. concerns about China's growing economic and military footprint in the region. China's reduction of its insular policies and development of sizeable maritime assets in a remarkably short time was likely a central driver of Myanmar's internal reform initiatives.

China has viewed Myanmar as a vassal since at least independence and further asserted this notion after the 1988 coup. It was able to increase its political and

economic influence because relations with traditional democratic donor nations had been effectively severed. To achieve strategic goals in Myanmar, China has invested heavily in Myanmar's most powerful institution, its armed forces or *Tatmadaw*. It will probably maintain this approach and Myanmar will probably continue to maintain favorable military relations with Chinese counterparts. China's support to the military junta provided time and space to rebuff international criticism, including incentives to change its behavior. Specifically, China provided protection in the U.N. Security Council, military equipment and training, and economic investment when few others were willing to provide these types of assistance.¹⁶ In addition to China, relations with neighboring Southeast Asian states and India have been generally stable with regard to trade and investment. This further enabled Myanmar to withstand the economic impact of sanctions but Myanmar's mistrust of China eventually convinced junta leaders that even though its assistance helped insulate it from other foreign pressures, it was concerned that Chinese activities also threatened its sovereignty.¹⁷ The military junta has consistently demonstrated its preference for political power over economic prosperity and needed to implement changes that would lift over twenty years of U.S. sanctions to reinvigorate foreign investment that would reduce their overdependence on China.¹⁸ In practice, the road to political reform has been tenuous and fragile but even China desires greater stability within Myanmar. It has assisted Myanmar's leaders in resolving longstanding conflicts with ethnic groups that straddle their common border in order to secure its pipelines and ensure uninterrupted energy security.¹⁹ The U.S. is also deeply concerned about ethnic tensions but renewed U.S. interest in Myanmar is based on the larger strategic context of checking China's political and economic influence. High level

U.S. interest in Myanmar continues because China has increased efforts to maintain influence with Myanmar's military and civilian leaders. In essence, Myanmar is important because U.S. strategic rebalance objectives are inextricably tied to China's rise as a peer competitor. To that end, increased U.S. influence in Myanmar adds another complicating factor to China's foreign policy calculations, especially with respect to Beijing's South and Southeast Asia policies.

Like China and India, the United States has many strategic interests in Asia's stability and prosperity. Similarities include weapons of mass destruction (WMD), transnational terrorism, environmental issues, and economic prosperity. However, India and the U.S. are both concerned about China's growing regional influence. India has the potential to be a major factor in controlling China's expansion. The Obama administration has actively engaged India's current administration and enjoys favorable relations with Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This partnership is essential to countering Chinese influence, especially in Myanmar's case. India can diplomatically and militarily pressure China while doing more to assist Myanmar with reforms that lessen dependence upon China. Myanmar and India have long ties and their Asian perspectives are more similar than U.S. worldviews.²⁰ This perception allows the U.S. to focus on its values-based democracy and human rights agenda in Myanmar while other nations exercise engagement consistent with their national interests and values.

Another influential nation with historical and religious ties to Myanmar is Japan. Tokyo is taking advantage of several opportunities to engage Myanmar with an agenda that includes Myanmar's economy, natural resources, and its ability to influence China's activities in Myanmar. It has been increasing efforts to provide economic assistance for

the people of Myanmar since 2010 when Myanmar began implementing domestic political and economic reforms. Since parliamentary elections in March 2012, Japan agreed to fund several infrastructure projects, including port facilities as a means to improve its bilateral relationship with Myanmar.²¹ This increased application of soft power and humanitarian assistance comes at a time when Japan is deeply concerned about Chinese regional ambitions.

For decades China and Japan have proactively leveraged developmental assistance programs to advance sovereign interests and access strategically important resources throughout Asia and beyond. This strategy, paired with Myanmar's liberalization efforts, has attracted greater foreign assistance and erodes China's regional standing. China has enjoyed the most influence since most donor nations dramatically reduced aid following the 1988 military coup even though India and Japan did not support U.S. sanctions. However, the recent influx of economic assistance from a variety of donor nations has enabled Myanmar to exercise greater sovereignty and reduce China's influence. Thus, China's strained relations with Myanmar are becoming more complicated and problematic with more nations willing to engage Myanmar. As much as China abhors transparency and partnering, it may find itself in a situation where cooperation with other donor nations is essential to maintain its stake in Myanmar. China has demonstrated no such capacity in other areas such as the East and South China Seas but Myanmar is different because China does not have a land border on the Bay of Bengal and would like to maintain influence within Indian Ocean littoral nations.²² Given the similarities of donor nation interests, collaboration among

donor nations brings more diverse foreign investment and could minimize internecine relationships among competing donor nations.

China would also like to retain its influence over Myanmar without jeopardizing its relations with competing nations. Recognizing this, regional stability is a common interest and stakeholder nations can make concessions in order to advance their respective strategic interests through calculated policymaking. Understanding these political dynamics, the U.S. must carefully consider how to continue engaging Myanmar's newly democratic government, especially with regard to the *Tatmadaw*.

Issues with Existing Engagement Policy

Although its motives can be unclear at times, Myanmar's leadership deliberately implemented democratic reforms over the past decade. Its liberalization created a means for it to balance internal and external interests. However, its government has not yet made enough progress toward increasing civilian control of the military, eliminating human rights abuses, breaking ties with North Korea, rendering politics more inclusive, and resolving ethnic tensions. Myanmar has pursued many of these reforms halfheartedly. Meanwhile, Washington has seemingly turned a blind eye to the *Tatmadaw*'s reluctance to commit to Myanmar's reform agenda in order to pursue its own interests with China. The strategic rebalance signaled Washington's vital interests in the region and Myanmar's location is an important component of this strategy, specifically strong bilateral relations. These relations could be a potential source of embarrassment if U.S. military engagement progresses ahead of Myanmar's military reforms. Therefore, the U.S. policy should be anchored to democratic values and military engagement should be limited to humanitarian and governance themes until the aforementioned issues are resolved.

Reforming Myanmar's military will take several years since it has been the most powerful institution for over half a century and has a reputation for human rights violations, oppression of ethnic and religious minorities, and military ties to North Korea.²³ The transition to actual civilian rule is incomplete and reform activities leading up to the next election, scheduled for late 2015, will probably fall short of U.S. expectations. As mentioned earlier, Myanmar's 2008 constitution mandates a 25 percent military quota in parliament, allowing the military the power to approve or deny any constitutional amendments. In order to be consistent with U.S. values, Myanmar's current administration would need to amend the constitution before elections and the military would need support this and its own internal reforms. Specifically, the *Tatmadaw* would have to improve upon its transparency and accountability, especially in the areas of budget, operations, and commercial business activities. Failure to implement these reforms could result in loss of public trust and confidence in current administration and may lead to further reform stagnation. Although some reforms have been encouraging, many of Myanmar's 2012 and 2013 promises to President Obama remain unrealized. Two items of significant interest are Myanmar's failure to deal with the stateless Rohingya people issue and toward severing military ties with North Korea.²⁴ Further, reconciliatory political dialogue has not yet resulted from ceasefire agreements with 12 of 13 ethnic groups. The U.S. Congress has responded to these shortcomings by proposing H.R.4377, The Myanmar Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2014. This act would prohibit security assistance funding to the government of Myanmar until the Secretary of State certifies credible that their government has taken credible steps toward implementing promised reforms.²⁵ Moreover, the language of H.R.

3979 FY 15 NDAA, Military-to-Military Engagement with Burma (§ 1253) permits only limited engagement with Myanmar's military and essentially prohibits activities not related to institutional reform and humanitarian assistance. The current calibrated engagement approach with Myanmar should be revised to address increased concerns of human rights advocates and restore Congressional confidence. Based on the above developments, the following policy options provide some opportunities to recalibrate engagement and maintain influence in a country key to Washington's Asia strategy.

Recalibration Options to Current Policy

The first option would be to prohibit further military engagement until the desired conditions are met. Cooperation with Myanmar's military has progressed ahead of the pace of necessary reforms and, therefore, expanded U.S. military engagement beyond current activities would be prohibited in order to stress the conditional and values-based nature of U.S. reengagement. Under this option, the DoD and Congress would be sending a unified message that Myanmar has implemented essential reforms far too slowly. Until Myanmar implements reforms, only existing capacity building programs focused on rule of law and human rights would continue since they are limited in focus to promoting democratic values, human rights awareness, and rule of law reform. Prohibiting further military engagement until agreed-upon benchmarks are met is a balanced way to improve the resolve and commitment of Myanmar's government.²⁶ This principled approach also would mitigate potential Congressional issues and likely receive support from Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD party. This option would not affect ongoing military assistance programs from other donor nations such as India, Australia, and Great Britain. These programs would continue to reduce China's influence within the *Tatmadaw* and improve allies' and partners' influence, which by extension continue

to benefit the U.S. Although DoD military programs would become limited in scope, Myanmar would continue to desire them, effectively countering Chinese influence.

A second option would be to increase U.S. military engagement in order to accelerate the pace of reform and enhance Washington's influence. Specifically, the U.S. would expand security cooperation activities beyond rule of law and security sector reform programs. Washington could extend programs to a broader military and police audience by augmenting U.S. Law Enforcement programs with appropriate DoD instructors.²⁷ Myanmar's officers and NCOs would also benefit from attending long courses at U.S.-based military institutions that teach norms of civil-military relations in order to restore public trust in Myanmar's security sector. Interaction with uniformed U.S. strategic leaders would increase exposure to democratic values and provide alternate viewpoints to Myanmar's leaders, who have been extensively influenced by decades of Chinese military training programs. Rotational military medical missions would be deployed to areas affected by drug resistant malaria to build Myanmar's military medical capacity and give it a more humanitarian focused mission.²⁸ Because this option communicates U.S. willingness to engage a military with significant human rights and rule of law deficiencies, Congress and human rights advocates would need to be convinced that more military assistance would have a catalytic and positive effect on reform within Myanmar's ranks. This could accelerate Myanmar's overall efforts to revamp its image and may decrease China's influence within the *Tatmadaw*. On a cautionary note, increased U.S. military engagement could also be perceived as provocative and unintentionally create a security dilemma with China.

A third option would be a multilateral approach, aligning U.S. - Myanmar military assistance with ASEAN programs. Myanmar chaired ASEAN in 2014 and, capitalizing on Myanmar's successful leadership of a multilateral organization, the U.S. could promulgate a unique approach to Southeast Asian military activities that places ASEAN leadership at the forefront and utilize ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) exercises and deployments to demonstrate unity of action toward pervasive issues such as narcotics production and trafficking, drug resistant malaria, human rights issues, humanitarian crises, and territorial disputes. This ARF-led framework in Myanmar would have U.S. participants serving as subject matter experts and neighboring countries like Thailand and Laos providing the majority of participants. Similar to Myanmar sending military observers to routine regional, multilateral military exercises such as COBRA GOLD in Thailand, Myanmar's internal military exercises could focus on humanitarian crises modeled after 2008's Cyclone Nargis as one possible scenario. This construct gives Myanmar's security forces more exposure to non-Chinese security forces, highlights the importance of humanitarian missions, and demonstrates U.S. military programs closely aligned with ASEAN partners. Even though there would be potential political and bureaucratic issues at the outset, these could be overcome and long term benefits would be worth the effort. This framework could also be helpful with regard to resolving extraterritorial sovereignty issues in the South China Sea. Multilateral exercises are the norm in the region and Myanmar would likely be receptive to expanded interaction, albeit cautious with regard to exercises within its own troubled areas. Human rights advocates and concerned domestic audiences would likely applaud a multilateral approach where activities would be strictly humanitarian in nature. The main drawback

to this option is that it would likely take several years to realize the benefits and Myanmar would be hesitant to agree to this framework in the near term. Further, the U.S. should exercise more restraint in the region as its actions send mixed signals and this may indicate to China another attempt at containment and cause it to escalate other activities in response.

Suggested Military Engagement Approach

Washington's reengagement strategy with Myanmar's fledgling democracy has been incremental, developing a strategic partnership pragmatically and patiently. The DoD needs to maintain a strategy in step with Congress that ties increased military assistance directly to the advancement of essential reforms. In addition to Myanmar's peaceful transition out of decades of military rule, our national interests are focused on China's rise in economic and military might. A recalibrated military engagement strategy would maintain existing DoD security cooperation programs because they influence Myanmar's security sector stakeholders. These programs are also strictly limited to promoting democratic values, human rights awareness, and rule of law reform. Prohibiting further military engagement until agreed-upon benchmarks are met should strengthen the resolve and commitment of Myanmar's reformers. This principled approach also mitigates potential long-term resentment from ethnic minorities that have captured the interest of international human rights advocates. Future security cooperation programs must provide the ability for the U.S. to demonstrate its unwillingness to compromise on central issues and gives Myanmar the space to progress at its own pace without feeling threatened by external influences. This approach prevents domestic political backlash and permits gradual implementation of

long term programs that would emerge from the U.S. mission's current in-country activities.

These activities include USAID-led development programs, public diplomacy activities, security sector capacity building programs, and reintroduction of U.S. companies operating in Myanmar. The military portion of Washington's strategy could remain limited to rule of law and human rights focused topics until military transparency improves. Transparency would be measured through development of a round-table forum that builds consensus among donor military nations (including China) and Myanmar's civilian and military leaders. Consensus among stakeholders would be achieved through the establishment of milestones and mutually agreeable standards of performance.

Considering China's human rights record and extensive ties with the *Tatmadaw*, donor nation military assistance should focus on humanitarian activities and be directed at rebuilding trust in former conflict areas. This collective defense partnership framework would demonstrate openness and improve the *Tatmadaw's* image by working with civilian populations in local communities. Providing equipment would be discouraged but could be approved on a case-by-case basis provided it improves a necessary capability, such as medical response to infectious diseases. The U.S. military model of professionalism will help to reshape attitudes toward ethnic minorities and civilian officials. Close relationships with Washington's allies and partners will be leveraged to bolster U.S. credibility and mitigate risk of a relapse to military rule. These relationships also minimize concerns about whether a reduction of U.S. military assistance would cede ground to others such as China. Also, a limited U.S. military presence may even

mollify China and reduce the possibility of strategic misunderstanding. Encouraging support of round-table activities should lead to broader regional cooperation. Myanmar would try to balance American, Japanese, Indian, and Chinese influence and leverage this unified approach to demonstrate the *Tatmadaw's* progress toward transparency. India's close proximity to Myanmar and large armed force would presumably contribute the most militarily, if adequately resourced and prioritized. Donor nations such as Australia and Great Britain would also wield considerable influence and address gaps not covered by U.S. military programs. Improved military relations between the U.S. and India should signal to China that its String of Pearls approach should be cooperative in nature and not threaten freedom of navigation. This approach also discourages the practice of leveraging bilateral defense relations to achieve security goals not consistent with reform objectives. Added transparency also would provide data essential for stakeholders to accurately report progress.

This strategy is sustainable because it allows Myanmar's political, economic, and social conditions to gradually evolve. It also provides donor military nations the insights to make necessary adjustments, both positive and negative. Military trade with North Korea continues to be a non-negotiable component for Washington and non-compliant members of the *Tatmadaw* would be singled out and denied the benefits of multilateral cooperation. USAID would continue to lead activities targeted at improving quality of life through development. These programs have a secondary benefit of addressing military transparency through inclusive, multilateral development programs.

This suggested strategy has minimal risks because it is not an extreme departure from the current engagement policy. Because Myanmar is a lesser known Asian country

and U.S. activities would be underwritten by Aung San Suu Kyi, U.S. domestic response would likely be favorable and go largely unnoticed. Myanmar, on the other hand, is acutely interested in maintaining favorable U.S. relations to balance China's regional influence. Restricting growth of U.S. military programs communicates Washington's adamancy regarding fulfillment of reform promises. Myanmar needs favorable long term U.S. relations in order to balance its neighbors and bolster its economy. These relations allow Myanmar to be less dependent upon China, provide India an opportunity to increase its influence, and give the U.S. a stronger regional partner in a geopolitically important location. This strategy ensures persistent and productive U.S. engagement with Myanmar and the Asia-Pacific region consistent with our overarching strategic framework.

Conclusion

The United States' decision to reestablish favorable relations with Myanmar was an essential component of its strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region. Favorable U.S. – Myanmar relations are essential to Asia-Pacific regional stability in the 21st century. Strategic rebalance success and preservation of Washington's moral high ground can be achieved and maintained in Myanmar. A recalibrated military engagement strategy with Myanmar addresses concerns of human rights advocates, Congress, and incentivizes acceleration of democratic reforms.

Prohibiting further military engagement with Myanmar's military demonstrates a measure of calibrated restraint. This approach does not jeopardize bilateral relations because Myanmar is committed to reducing China's influence and growing strong relations with Washington. Myanmar's reforms will undoubtedly continue and its military will still benefit from well-crafted U.S. DoD engagement programs. Washington's allies

and partners will continue to challenge China, of which a significant portion would be from India. Success for the U.S. is achieved through a strategy that is not defined by enhanced bilateral military relations during Myanmar's peaceful transition to civilian rule.

Increasing Washington's influence in Myanmar requires continuous engagement that includes leveraging India to balance China.²⁹ However, U.S. engagement must be consistent with American values, preserve U.S. integrity, and demonstrate Washington's unwillingness to compromise on governance and human rights issues in Myanmar. Maintaining the status quo does not adequately express U.S. concerns about Myanmar's government.

Endnotes

¹ Euan Graham, "Southeast Asia in the US Rebalance: Perceptions from a Divided Region," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 35, no. 3 (December 2013): 305.

² Gwen Robinson and Lionel Barber, "Myanmar Opens Oil and Gas Auction." *FT.com Online*, April 11, 2013.

³ Robert D. Kaplan, "Geography Rules: It's All About Spheres of Influence." *STRATFOR Online*, August 21, 2013.

⁴ James R. Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "China's Naval Ambitions in the Indian Ocean," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 31, no. 3 (June 2008): 367.

⁵ David Brewster, "Beyond the 'String of Pearls: is there really a Sino-Indian security dilemma in the Indian Ocean?" *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 10, no. 2 (2014): 133.

⁶ Colin Dueck, "The Return of Geopolitics." *Real Clear World Online*. July 27, 2013.

⁷ Gurpreet S. Khurana, "China's 'String of Pearls' in the Indian Ocean and Its Security Implications," *Strategic Analysis* 32, no. 1 (January 2008): 3.

⁸ Namrata Goswami, "China's 'Aggressive' Territorial Claim on India's Arunachal Pradesh: A Response to Changing Power Dynamics in Asia," *Strategic Analysis* 35, no. 5, (August 2011): 781.

⁹ Ranjit Gupta, "China, Myanmar and India: A Strategic Perspective," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 8, no. 1 (January 2013): 87.

¹⁰ Sheldon Simon, "U.S.-Southeast Asia Relations: U.S. Frustrated as Burma Obstructs Cyclone Relief." *Comparative Connections, a Quarterly E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations Online*, (July 2008).

¹¹ Ibid., 80.

¹² Kurt M. Campbell, "U.S. Policy Toward Burma," U.S. Department of State. October 21, 2009. <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/10/130769.htm> (accessed September 10, 2014).

¹³ Roman David and Ian Holliday, "International sanctions or international justice? Shaping political development in Myanmar," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 66, no. 2, (March 2012): 122.

¹⁴ Author Not Provided, "Less Thunder Out of China; Relations with Myanmar." *The Economist*, October 06, 2012, 56.

¹⁵ Author Not Provided, "Congress Eyes Chevron's Role in Burma," *Financial Times*, October 24, 2007, 3.

¹⁶ David I. Steinberg and Hongwei Fan, *Modern China-Myanmar Relations: Dilemmas of Mutual Dependence*, (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 299.

¹⁷ Kyaw Yin Hlaing, "Understanding Recent Political Changes in Myanmar," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 34, no. 2 (August 2012): 199.

¹⁸ Ranjit Gupta, "China, Myanmar and India: A Strategic Perspective."

¹⁹ Maitrii Aung-Thwin, "Myanmar in 2013: Integration and the Challenge of Reform," *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (2014): 205.

²⁰ Amit Gupta, "India and the United States," in *Global Security Watch – India* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2012), 81.

²¹ James Reilly, "China and Japan in Myanmar: Aid, Natural Resources and Influence," *Asian Studies Review* 37, no.2 (June 2013): 153.

²² Ibid., 154.

²³ Donald M. Seekins, "Burma and U.S. Sanctions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime," *Asian Survey* 45, no. 3 (May 2005): 439.

²⁴ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, *U.S. Relations With Burma Fact Sheet*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, 2014).

²⁵ *Burma Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2014*, H.R.4377, 113th Congress (September 09, 2014).

²⁶ Steve Hirsch, "Cracks Appear in US Myanmar Rapprochement." *The Diplomat Online*, April 30, 2014.

²⁷ David Steinberg, "The Problem with H.R. 4377, the Burma Human Rights and Democracy Act of 2014." *cogitASIA Online*. May 07, 2014.

²⁸ J. Stephen Morrison, Murray Hiebert, Todd Summers, Thomas Cullison and Sahil Angelo, "Myanmar: Regressed, Stalled, or Moving Forward?" (Washington, DC: CSIS, October 2014).

²⁹ Peter A. Coclanis, "The Myanmar moment? Why Washington made its move," *World Affairs Online* 174, no. 5, 89 (January/February 2012).