



# RCAS Commentary

## **Myanmar's Prolonged Emergency Rule: A Setback for Human Rights and Peace**

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## About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN*, *Global Times*, *World Affairs* in China. RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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*Sujit Kumar Datta*

The political and humanitarian situation in Myanmar has worsened, with the governing junta extending the state of emergency for another six months. Myanmar has experienced instability, bloodshed, and human rights violations since the February 1, 2021, military coup that overthrew the democratic government of Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi. The junta defended the prolongation of emergency rule as necessary for a “free and fair” election, which both local and international observers denounced. This move undermines peace and democracy and worsens the suffering of the Myanmar people, who have already seen military brutality for two years.



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The present issue in Myanmar stems from the military's unwillingness to acknowledge the results of the November 2020 general election, in which Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD won a landslide majority. The military fabricated election fraud allegations, detained Suu Kyi, President Win Myint, and key officials, and declared a one-year state of emergency. The junta has regularly prolonged the emergency rule, citing the necessity for stability and election preparation. Critics argue such extensions are used to reinforce military power and suppress opposition.

The military has caused civil war-like unrest, with pro-democracy groups, ethnic armed organizations, and people retaliating. International criticism of the junta's

aggression of protestors, mass arrests, and civil unrest persists. According to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners (AAPP), over 3,000 individuals have been slain and over 20,000 jailed since the coup. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated, causing millions to face food insecurity, lack of health care, and other basics.

In announcing the prolongation, the junta said that the emergency rule ensures a “stable” general election. State-owned media MRTV said additional time is needed for stability and peace, which are essential for free and fair elections. This explanation has been widely criticized as a pretext to delay the restoration of civilian administration. Critics argue that Myanmar’s objective is to maintain power, suppress opponents, and manipulate elections to justify its rule.

The record of the junta is not promising. Military administrations have been accused of electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and opposition party exclusion during elections. There are growing concerns that the next election may be a sham to reinstate military rule instead of democracy. The junta’s communication with pro-democracy movements and ethnic groupings undermines its claims.

Extending emergency rule in Myanmar has severe human rights effects. While claiming to restore order, the military has increased fear and repression. Security forces have targeted civilians, including women and children, via raids, airstrikes, and arson attacks. Numerous human rights crimes, including extrajudicial murders, torture, and sexual assault, have been widely publicised.

The junta has successfully repressed dissent by restricting freedom of speech, assembly, and press. This issue is also devastating from a humanitarian standpoint. The UN reports that over 1.5 million people have increased their area of residence, and over 18 million need humanitarian aid. Blockade from military locations hinders help from accessing conflict-affected regions, worsening its impact on civilians who need food, medication, and shelter. The junta has ignored international calls to stop bloodshed and give humanitarian organizations access to people.

The global response to the Myanmar issue is uneven. Although numerous countries and organizations have condemned the junta, the impact has been negligible. Myanmar has faced criticism for its participation in ASEAN, which has struggled to meet its required criteria of conduct. Although ASEAN approved a Five-Point Consensus in April 2021 to cease violence and promote constructive debate, it has only held its members accountable, not the junta that caused discord and lack of progress.

The UN and Western governments have not exerted significant pressure on the junta. Despite targeted sanctions and diplomatic isolation, the military’s campaign persists.

China and Russia, as permanent UN Security Council members, have shielded the junta from more decisive action, citing non-interference in domestic matters. The current geopolitical split hinders prompt disaster action.

Expanding emergency authority in Myanmar is a significant threat to human rights, democracy, and peace. International cooperation is necessary to break the cycle of violence and repression. The following stages towards settlement may include:

**Increased International Pressure:** The global community should apply targeted sanctions, weapons embargoes, and accountability measures to the junta. The UN Security Council must overcome geographical divides and act decisively to prevent a catastrophe.

**Increased assistance for pro-democracy groups, ethnically armed groups, and civil society:** The international community should assist democratic forces, ethnic armed groups, and civil society players. Examples include humanitarian help, technical assistance, and diplomatic support.

**ASEAN must adopt a principled and firmer stance against Myanmar:** It involves implementing the Five-Point Consensus, engaging in inclusive discussions, and halting Myanmar's misdeeds until the outcomes are clear.

**Global Community Collaboration:** The junta should guarantee that humanitarian groups have unrestricted access to provide relief to people in need. The global community should collaborate with local partners to assist conflict-affected communities.

**Accountability:** Increased accountability is needed to hold the junta responsible for human rights breaches. It includes supporting international inquiries like the ICC and documenting war crimes.

**Reconciliation:** A sustainable crisis resolution requires inclusiveness, including the junta, pro-democracy movements, and ethnic groupings. The international community must support and assist these initiatives.

The ongoing emergency rule in Myanmar highlights the challenges the country confronts and the international system once again fails to address. The junta has violated democracy and human rights and perpetuated bloodshed and suffering. For a secure, peaceful, and prosperous Myanmar, the international community must collaborate for long-term justice, accountability, and respect for the people.

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## About Author



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