

# CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Summary of Argument

This thesis has probed possible causes of the downfall of Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence by analyzing the power relations between Military Intelligence and the *Tatmadaw*. It has underscored the conflicting interests between the *Tatmadaw*, the sole institution of power in Myanmar, and Military Intelligence under Khin Nyunt, a relatively new player in the military scene. It questioned the widely held view of Khin Nyunt as one of the most powerful generals in Myanmar and the “omnipotence” of Military Intelligence in the society of Myanmar.

Research findings suggest that Military Intelligence, though militarily weak, sought for sources of power outside of the military. It depended on Khin Nyunt’s ability to negotiate with the foes and threats to the *Tatmadaw*. The power from these sources, the armed ethnic groups, the political parties, the international community, the regional community such as ASEAN, the neighbouring countries such as Thailand, grew rapidly and extensively, posing a threat to the status quo of the entrenchment of the *Tatmadaw* in the political and economic fabrication of the society. With the tight grip on media, Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence sought to present the new, “better” image of the military government to the world which challenged the values of the *Tatmadaw*. In the end, Military Intelligence that was supposed to function as the eyes and ears for the *Tatmadaw* acted as if it had the mind of its own. The *Tatmadaw* leadership decided to terminate it in order to keep the coherence and the unity of the military under its command.

Chapter One laid out the questions and analytical issues this thesis addresses. It explains theories for the deterioration of military regimes in Latin America and applies them to the case of Myanmar’s *Tatmadaw* in analysing the power relations between Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence, the *Tatmadaw* and the society.

Chapter Two analyzed the power relations between Military Intelligence and the *Tatmadaw* on both institutional and personal levels. Within the *Tatmadaw*, Military Intelligence was a small military power though it exerted coercive power against the civilian side of the society which made Military Intelligence the most detested organ of the *Tatmadaw*.

On the institutional level, there were signs of rivalry between Military Intelligence and the Army. As Military Intelligence took up the role of a government within the government, their sphere of influence of Military Intelligence grew extensively. The case of Economic Research Unit presents the fact that Military Intelligence even oversaw the economic affairs and even directed Central Bank among many other things. Military Intelligence became more powerful in non-military areas, which created the institutional tension between the Military Intelligence-as-government and the *Tatmadaw*-as-institution.

On the personal level, Khin Nyunt's political bargaining succeeded to forge better relationship with former enemies of the *Tatmadaw*, such as the armed ethnic groups, the political groups such as NLD, and the regional group such as ASEAN, from which Khin Nyunt acquired new political power. For the mindset of the rest of the *Tatmadaw* leadership, this was perceived as conciliatory to the foes and threats to the *Tatmadaw* while Khin Nyunt reaped political and economical benefits from the successful negotiations. Thus, the causes of conflicts between Khin Nyunt, Military Intelligence and the *Tatmadaw* could be found both on institutional and personal levels.

Chapter Three analysed the power dynamics of economy and its relations between Military Intelligence and the *Tatmadaw*. Research found that Military Intelligence was a new emerging economy. Whereas the *Tatmadaw* had traditionally been involved in Myanmar's economy such as heavy industry, mining and agricultural sector, Military Intelligence found new business in a niche market, including media and Information Technology. With his negotiating skills, Khin Nyunt forged new alliance with the armed ethnic groups and the regional players such as Thailand's Prime Minister Thaksin, which brought Military Intelligence new lucrative business deals and resources. With the armed ethnic groups came new business chances in border trade. The *Tatmadaw* perceived that Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence were dominating and monopolizing

the public resources, which caused the conflict of economic interests. The *Tatmadaw* intervened to stop all these business projects initiated by Military Intelligence.

Chapter Four illustrated Military Intelligence's power over information. Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence had a tight grip on both inflow and outflow of information. With that power, they projected "a better image" of the military government and Khin Nyunt. But the "better image" clashed with the values which *the Tatmadaw* held. Suu Kyi's photos or articles about the democratizing process of Myanmar appeared on the *Myanmar Times*, which the son of Military Intelligence senior official owned, would almost never appear on the state-owned newspaper. *Myanmar Times* was symbolic of the near-autonomy and defiant attitude of Military Intelligence to the *Tatmadaw* leadership. The new values the "better image" carried posed a threat to the values of the *Tatmadaw*, hence the forceful termination of the activities of Military Intelligence.

The thesis concludes that although Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence neither posed a physical threat to the leadership nor attempted to stage a coup d'état to take over the top leader's post, Military Intelligence challenged the *Tatmadaw* by gaining various power bases elsewhere than the *Tatmadaw*. Politically, economically and culturally, Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence outgrew their given position in the military to pose a threat to the *Tatmadaw*. Thus, in the end the *Tatmadaw* leadership decided to oust Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence in order to keep the coherence of the *Tatmadaw*. The *Tatmadaw* chose its first and foremost priority to keep itself firmly as the military institution.

## 5.2 Purge-ridden Military Intelligence – Systematic Failure?

When the ouster of Khin Nyunt took place, elderly citizens with long-term memory in Yangon made the same comment, "this is nothing new in our history".<sup>1</sup> The life on the civilian side of the society continued as if nothing had happened. The modern history of the *Tatmadaw* indeed has witnessed repetitions of purges from large

---

<sup>1</sup> Personal communications, Yangon, October 2004

to small scale. In 1983, the Intelligence Chief Brig. Tin Oo was sacked with a huge portion of the intelligence community, for which a main explanation was that Tin Oo was becoming too popular and powerful thus becoming a threat to the late President Ne Win.

Two decades before that event, in 1961, a series of similar purges took place under U Nu's government, which also had to do with the intelligence apparatus of the military. Gen. Ne Win, who was to lead the military coup the following year, fired Brig. Maung Maung, then Director of Military Training who was considered to be the second or third most powerful officer in the *Tatmadaw*. Callahan found that the ouster was probably due to the fact that "Ne Win did not approve Maung Maung's close working relationship with U.S. officials, particularly those from the CIA."<sup>2</sup> According to Callahan, Maung Maung had formed a "research unit" under his Directorate of Education to initiate counter-intelligence activities because Maung Maung and Ne Win agreed that the performance of the army's intelligence was poor. Maung Maung handpicked officers from the army, navy and air force to form the "research unit", for training which a CIA at the U.S. embassy helped to organize.<sup>3</sup> The reasons for the ouster, Callahan argued, could be either that Maung Maung's move led to a personal rivalry with then Director of Military Intelligence, Bo Lwin, who might have reported to Ne Win that Maung Maung was too close to the U.S. influence or that Maung Maung with his known strong anti-communism position, was seen to possibly mount a CIA-backed military coup against Ne Win. Maung Maung's "resignation" was followed by a purge of nine brigade commanders and one regional commander<sup>4</sup>, from which Ne Win reorganized the command structure of the *Tatmadaw* in preparation for the definitive military coup of 1962.

The history suggests that the repetitive purges have taken place within or closer circle of the intelligence apparatus. An observer astutely suggested that these purges are "symptoms of a systemic problem of a regime exerting tight social control through the coercive powers of an intelligence apparatus. The latter outgrew its usefulness when it became pervasive and all-powerful through its ability to amass and filter information (knowledge is power), exercise extra-judicial authority and enjoy great operational

---

<sup>2</sup> Callahan, *Making Enemies*, p199

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p199

<sup>4</sup> *The Nation*, 6 February 1961 cited by Callahan, *Making Enemies*, p200

latitude in the name of national security. “<sup>5</sup> This analysis can suggest that as long as the *Tatmadaw* relies on its intelligence apparatus to force its will on the civilian side of the society, these purges inevitably recur in future. The fault may be embedded in its system.

### 5.3 Military-as-Institution vs. Military-as-Government

It is of interest once again to go back to the “Military Regime Collapse” theories of Latin America. Rouquie and Przeworski advocated that the military could not become the government without ceasing to be the military and that conflicts arise between the military-as-government and military-as-institution. In case of Myanmar, the *Tatmadaw* did not collapse, but the conflicts were serious enough that the whole intelligence organ had to be extirpated. It was the *Tatmadaw* as institution itself which delegated the authority to Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence to function as government. Therefore, could it be analyzed that the pattern of repetitive purges of intelligence apparatus is exactly the pattern of this conflict between military-as-institution and military-as-government?

The difference between Latin America and Myanmar is that in Myanmar the *Tatmadaw*-as-institution has always prevailed over intelligence-as-government. It may be because the *Tatmadaw*, when faced with choices between becoming the government or staying as the military, chooses to stay as the military. Another reason could be that even if some members of the *Tatmadaw* wish to transform the military into government, there are no substantial groups outside the *Tatmadaw* to form alliance with, whereas in case of Latin America, there were ample potential political allies outside the institution of the military.

Therefore, it could be argued that as long as the *Tatmadaw* delegates the authority to run the day-to-day affairs of the civilian side of the society to a group – in the past it was usually Military Intelligence – the pattern of conflict between the *Tatmadaw* –as – institution and the *Tatmadaw*(a group of) -as-government will occur from time to time. Again, the flaw exists already when the *Tatmadaw* stays in power to run the government.

---

<sup>5</sup> Name withheld, ‘The Praetorian Paradox – the Pathology of Coercive Power’, *Asian Analysis*, December 2004, accessed at <http://www.aseanfocus.com/asiananalysis/article.cfm?articleID=801> on 10 March 2006

To date, there exists a strong tendency among observers of Myanmar to look at Myanmar as very unique and to believe that nothing like it exists elsewhere. Cultural explanations for the durability of the *Tatmadaw* rule derive from same approach. But to take a step back to compare between the experiences of countries of different region of the world such as Latin America and what is happening in Myanmar now would be fascinating and may help us understand in totally different light. This could be a subject of further research.

#### 5.4 The Wave of Globalization

Analysing the power of economy led the author to the realization that the wave of globalization did not pass over Myanmar, even though the country is under heavy economic sanction by the west. Alvin Toffler in 1980 categorized power in three different forms: Violence, Wealth and Knowledge. His argument was that knowledge, not violence nor money, is the essence of power in the information age of the twenty first century.<sup>6</sup> The author does not agree with his argument from the point that there are many parts of the world where violence still rules, however, it is interesting to look at power from his categories. At the end of the twentieth century which saw several of the deadliest wars in human history, Toffler's expectations for knowledge-based societies were high. In his view, "the third wave" was engulfing the world, whereby power of knowledge was replacing commercial wealth as primary source of power. Applying these categories of power to Myanmar, the military's primary power is what was categorized as violence. It is the might of military that still holds the ultimate power than any other forms. Wealth comes along with the might. The military is the dominant institution "co-opting and controlling the economy".<sup>7</sup> The open-door-policy and market-oriented economic policy of the military regime since 1988 has made the military even more "ubiquitous"<sup>8</sup> throughout the social and economic system of the society as a whole.

In Myanmar's economic scene with which the military so inter-woven, Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence did not have a big place in comparison with the giant

---

<sup>6</sup> See Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave* (1980) and *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, Violence at the Edge of 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (1990), both New York, Bantam Books.

<sup>7</sup> Steinberg, *Burma* p135

<sup>8</sup> Steinberg, *Burma* p74

Army in the early stage. Whereas the Army had to fight less and less through the 1990's, Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence were busy negotiating with the political counterparts and armed ethnic groups. The wave of globalization did reach Myanmar, too, and Military Intelligence had the sources of power, that was information or knowledge in Toffler's term. They also had human resources, who understood what was going on in the outside world, spoke English, and knew how to negotiate, rather than to fight. It matched the timing when the military government was encouraging government departments unofficially to generate additional income rather than relying on government's supply of rice and oil.

Military Intelligence used its full capacity of knowledge to start its business in Information Technology and media sectors, as discussed in Chapter three and four. On top of being newly emerging economic power, through their business, the outright cronyism became prevalent as in the case of Bagan Cybertech or the *Myanmar Times*. In case of Bagan Cybertech, Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and the company Shin Satellite which Thaksin founded were involved, and 100 million USD worth of credit line from the Thai government was guaranteed between the two countries, largely for the satellite and telecommunication infrastructure deal.

Power of money made Military Intelligence vulnerable in the sense that the top senior officials in particular became too preoccupied with excitement and the wealth that the new Information Technology brought. A former Military Intelligence officer who had worked in the *Tatmadaw* since the 1970's admitted that as the responsibilities and the size of Military Intelligence expanded, the organization became bulkier and the quality of personnel deteriorated. Senior officers who were involved in IT or media seemed far too busy with business that they were distracted from their intelligence profession, to the extent that they could not detect or prevent the grave and imminent danger they faced.

### **5.5 Khin Nyunt's Contradictions**

The downfall of Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence was the consequence of the power dynamics within the *Tatmadaw*. The author feels, though, the fundamental vulnerability of Khin Nyunt was the overwhelming contradictions which his positions in the military and the government had obliged him.

Khin Nyunt's tasks as Chief of Military Intelligence and as Secretary One of SPDC and later the Prime Minister of Myanmar were contradictory in many aspects. These contradictions were a source of vulnerability for him. As Spy Chief Khin Nyunt had the task of extracting information from potential political and insurgent enemies and "crush internal and external elements" if needed. He was also responsible for negotiating with its political enemy Aung San Suu Kyi and NLD. Khin Nyunt and his subordinates also held series of negotiations with ethnic armed groups which were more successful, with the concrete ceasefire agreements. At the same time Khin Nyunt had the face of the country when it came to international relations. In a desperate bid to break the deadlocked relationship with the U.S., Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence went as far as hiring a lobbying firm to sell Myanmar's better image to Washington, though unsuccessfully. The fact that he was often perceived as a "moderate" in the outside world proved his skill of negotiation and diplomacy. But that was contradictory to the fact that he and his agents were the most deplored by the countrymen of his own nation.

What was symbolically contradictory was the fact that Khin Nyunt became the most visible and high-profiled general of the armed forces. As Secretary One and Prime Minister, attending international conferences and visiting foreign countries representing Myanmar. Military Intelligence was a propaganda machine with Khin Nyunt at the top, who gave his own press conferences and led various press tours in the early years. Khin Nyunt oversaw contents of newspaper articles if the contents were concerned with him. Military Intelligence contributed a lot to making Khin Nyunt most visible general.

Khin Nyunt's visibility became an impediment for his position as Chief of Intelligence. Intelligence in general, by nature, involves clandestine operations and is a secretive organization. In no country does a professional spy profess his identity. Col. San Pwint, who was Deputy Head of Interior Department of Military Intelligence, (now jailed) published a book in 2004 of the history intelligence gathering during the Pagan period to the independence of Myanmar, wrote in its preface:

The Intelligence service acts as the eyes and the ears of the country. The Intelligence Forces are working hard with life's dedication for the interest of the country, the government and the people. The Intelligence forces are usually considered as an "Invisible Government" because of its important



role in governing the country. They are also thought as heroes behind the curtain because of the nature of their secret works.<sup>9</sup>

On the contrary, Military Intelligence under Khin Nyunt was more visible than any other organs of the Tatmadaw. They could not keep everything secretive anymore. The fact that Military Intelligence became so visible and penetrable might have suggested that it should have ceased as an intelligence organ.

### 5.5 True Colours of the *Tatmadaw*

Why did many observers perceive Khin Nyunt as “one of the most powerful” till the moment of his downfall? Journalist Aung Zaw believes, “we were misguided by his image. Khin Nyunt with Military Intelligence was a small part of the armed forces, but his image was inflated cleverly by bright and intelligent personnel around him.”<sup>10</sup> Military Intelligence’s weapons were the information and the media outlets, and the image of Khin Nyunt projected by Military Intelligence was larger than his real power within the military.

Military Intelligence was credited with “near omnipotence in Burma’s political realm”<sup>11</sup> and “ubiquitous and widely feared throughout the society”.<sup>12</sup> However, it was omnipotent and ubiquitous within the political realm in the civilian side of the society. The omnipotence of Military Intelligence was merely the reflection of the *Tatmadaw* on a mirror that was Myanmar civilian society. In truth, it is the institution of the *Tatmadaw* that remains omnipotent. Military Intelligence was only the tool to impose the will of the *Tatmadaw* on the civilians.

Military Intelligence staff, perhaps including Khin Nyunt himself, overestimated their power. Their political and economic power was growing too rapidly to the extent that it was going to monopolize the newly found wealth of intelligence business. The power did not match their military power, and was perceived to be abusive of the

---

<sup>9</sup> Col. San Pwint, *The Intelligence Service in the era of Ancient Myanmar Kingdoms* (San Yae Kyi Sar Pae, Yangon: 2004) Originally in Myanmar language.

<sup>10</sup> Author’s interview with Aung Zaw, Editor of the *Irrawaddy*, 7 February, 2006

<sup>11</sup> Bertil Lintner, “Velvet Glove”, *Far Easter Economic Review*, 7 May 1998 cited by Callahan, *Making Enemies*, p212

<sup>12</sup> Steinberg, *Burma*, p74

authority delegated by the military leadership. The military acted, resorting to its classic method – military intervention.

For the *Tatmadaw*, the existence of military order remained and will remain the utmost priority. The dismantling of Military Intelligence did not mean that Myanmar's military lost its intelligence apparatus. The police special branch has taken over some of the duties that used to belong to Military Intelligence such as monitoring political potential threats in Yangon. The Army under Maung Aye had most likely prepared to build a new organization that should be controlled more directly by the armed forces supreme command.<sup>13</sup> For now, with Khin Nyunt and Military Intelligence out of the picture, the leadership of the *Tatmadaw* has lost its eloquence. Its true colours are likely to emerge without the window-dressed, better-than-real image of the *Tatmadaw*.



---

<sup>13</sup> Bertil Litner, "Myanmar Payback Time" *Janes Defence Weekly*, 15 April 2005, accessed at [http://www.asiapacificms.com/articles/myanmar\\_payback/](http://www.asiapacificms.com/articles/myanmar_payback/) on 3 March 2006.