

Aung San Suu Kyi: Complicity With Tyranny

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Aung San Suu Kyi is the international face of Burma and a global icon of courage, endurance and moral authority. But as Guy Horton reports from Burma, she is now actively colluding with the Burmese military's violent campaigns against minority ethnic and religious groups.

The sound of the Secretary General of the United Nations welcoming a ceasefire on the radio was punctuated by the sound of heavy mortar shells. There was nowhere to run.

One morning in January this year I stood near the front line between the Kachin Independence and Burma armies. The former was defending some of the last remnants of its territory. The latter was inflicting a massive attack consisting of tens of thousands of troops, supported by helicopter gunships and jet fighter bombers under the direction of the Supreme Command.

It was a systematic onslaught. The sound of the Secretary General of the United Nations welcoming a ceasefire on the radio was punctuated by the sound of heavy mortar shells. There was nowhere to run. The Chinese border, a row of bamboos 400 yards away, was closed.

Two young boys behind me were preparing to defend their home made bunker with toy Kalishnikovs. On the wall sat an eight year old boy whose mother had been shot dead in her kitchen while he watched from the edge of a sugar cane field. He looked as though his eyes had been blown out. An old man wept uncontrollably after describing his daughter being bayoneted to death in front of him.

The people doing this were the Burmese army. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi actively disregards all this and refuses to visit Kachin State. It does not fit the narrative: democratic transition and the fairy tale democracy princess miraculously released from bondage.

I am not Kachin or Burmese. I am English. I am a Winston Churchill Fellow, sometime member of the Royal Geographical Society and Royal Society of Arts, and member of the Front Line Club. I have a BA and MA from Cambridge and post graduate qualifications from London University and Oxford Brookes. I can quote Chaucer for breakfast. I am as English as the Cotswolds, or a Windsor Park Oak tree, or a song thrush singing its heart out on a blustery February morning.

I therefore take exception to being shelled by an army now being aided by the British government on the recommendation of the world's democracy and human rights icon - Aung San Suu Kyi. I take further exception to the naivety, or cynicism, of The Elders, the Carter Centre, the Myanmar Peace Centre and Uncle Tom Cobley and all calling for 'peace', without the essential preconditions of a real peace in this multi-ethnic, multi-religious

country: a democratic and federal Constitution.

Questions must now be asked about Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's position – because what she is saying and doing seems to transcend mere evasiveness. It includes, amongst other things: apparent denial of ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Rakhine State; implicitly blaming Muslims for the violence because “global Muslim power is very great”; through her silence in the face of atrocity, passively condoning Buddhist hate speech; equation of the suffering of Buddhists with that of Muslims; sustained disregard of the violations inflicted on the Christian Kachin; encouragement of military collaboration between the British and the Bamar army that is responsible for repeated and multiple crimes against humanity; and condoning the army's actions by sharing the podium with the generals on March 27, 'Union Day'.

Her easiveness has now degenerated into complicity with the military-controlled government and its 'Burmanisation' policies, to shoehorn the multiple ethnicities of Burma into a single national identity. This does not appear to be naivety. It appears to be a deliberately chosen political policy. She appears to be doing the one thing no responsible politician in a volatile, multi-racial society should do: playing the race card to gain votes.

Such criticism is expressed with the greatest reluctance and deepest sadness. Aung San Suu Kyi has shown such noble grace and indefatigable courage under pressure that she has deserved and needed unqualified support. Through the long years of the world's indifference, I and others supported her without reservation, even while organisations like the International Crisis Group produced cleverly nuanced misrepresentations implying she was inflexible, stubborn, and irrelevant.

When her husband and I tried to arrange meetings in her support, he would resignedly lament that we would be lucky to get five people to turn up. And he was right. When I asked the bookshops in Oxford to place her work prominently in the store windows no one knew who this woman with an unpronounceable name was, or could be bothered to find out. Even the Oxford Town Council, her home town, had to be prodded into recognising and honouring her with the Freedom of the City Award.

In short, it appeared the candle of hope was being quietly snuffed out no matter how hard we worked to keep the flame burning. But now, in entirely new circumstances, candid questions must be asked. We are now no longer dealing with a vulnerable woman under house arrest, but with a freed global icon who may become Burma's next President, or Vice-President. The situation demands objective scrutiny and searching questions, not cult-like obsequiousness.

Why, 23 years after the 1990 election, has she not followed in her father's footsteps and appointed a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, shadow cabinet? Remember: a Christian Karen and a Muslim Cabinet Minister died with Aung San when he was assassinated.

Why has a set of policies for a shadow government not been drawn up?

Why did her NLD party boycott the 2010 elections and then stand in the 2012 by-elections, thus providing an apparently legitimate democratic fig leaf for the illegitimate military controlled government and the whole grotesquely rigged political transition?

Why did she take an oath of allegiance to a Constitution which legitimises the illegitimate military controlled government?

Why does she unrealistically promise hopes of reform when the military and its civilian thugs effectively control the Parliament?

Why does she want to stand for President? And so provide the military with apparent democratic legitimacy without any real transition to a federal democracy?

Why did she sit on the podium showing solidarity with the Generals at their annual military parade of March 27? Just after they had launched the biggest military assault on an ethnic people since the Second World War? An attack that caused thousands of deaths, including those of young conscripted Burmese soldiers forced to carry out human wave attacks?

Why did she endorse the [Letpadaung land grab](#) by the Chinese Wanbao mining company, and a Burmese military holding company? And in so doing, confirm the Constitution's denial of the right of the people of Burma to securely own property?

How were the results of the 1990 election allowed to be annulled when the combined votes for democratic parties approximately exceeded 80 percent? when this was a political disaster for which there are few parallels in modern history?

Why does she travel the World? Yet refuse to visit Rakhine and Kachin States where some 250,000 people have been terrorised out of their homes since her release and the 'democratic transition' began?

"To stay neutral between an aggressor and a victim is to side with the aggressor", she is reported to have said. Her comments, equating Buddhist with Muslim suffering while disregarding that of the Christian Kachin, appear to do just that.

In so doing she has become alarmingly close to being the military controlled government's complicit apologist. A single visit by Aung San Suu Kyi, accompanied by the world's media, to an internally displaced Rohingya or Kachin camp could have transformed perceptions of modern Burma around the world.

We need to stand back and see Burma's 'peace in our time' in a wider historical and geographical context. Governments may be making the same mistake they made in places like Iraq and Indo-China: implementing policies based on an inadequate understanding of the cultures and dynamics of the peoples of those regions.

Diem and Chalabi did not represent Vietnam or Iraq. Aung San Suu Kyi - born from the Bamar elite, educated in a Methodist English school in Rangoon until the age of fifteen, and who then lived abroad until the age of 44 - should not be the single prism through which the world sees Burma.

The global media's infatuation with Aung San Suu Kyi, and its wilful misrepresentation and endorsement of Burma's fatally flawed political process, has done incalculable harm to hopes of a genuine democracy ever being realised.

With Aung San Suu Kyi and much of the ethnic Burman 'opposition' co-opted by the military controlled government, the other ethnic peoples face a ghastly choice: to be coerced into signing 'peace agreements' that will turn them into impoverished wage slaves on their own land in the service of Bamar or foreign crony capitalists; or continue to resist, and risk annihilation.

Could this 'peace' possibly be precisely what Aung San Suu Kyi wants? She has always been first and foremost her idealised Father's daughter; and the army has always been the "soft spot" she "cannot help" but identify with. She once asked of the violently displaced Letpadaung farmers, forced to give up their land for a giant copper mine: "Why do they want their mountain?" One day they, and all the people of Burma, will offer the resounding reply: "Because it's ours!"

[Guy Horton](#), known as "The man who uncovered the truth about Burma", has worked in Burma and its border zones since 1998. From 2002-2005 he researched the violations inflicted on the eastern ethnic peoples, receiving funding from the Netherlands government. His 2005 report [Dying Alive](#) and supporting video footage received worldwide coverage and contributed to the submission of Burma to the UN Security Council in January 2007. As result of the report, the UN Committee on the Prevention of Genocide carried out an investigation and placed Burma Myanmar on the Genocide Alert list.

Since 2005, Guy has focused on establishing a coalition of governments, funders, institutions and leading international lawyers with the aim of getting the violations objectively and authoritatively investigated and analysed so that impunity can be addressed. He is a Research Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and has been affiliated to the Irish Centre for Human Rights investigating the plight of the Rohingya people in western Burma.

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