

Myanmar's Color Revolution and the Mysterious "Soft Coup" Attempt, Part II

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(Please read [Part I](#) of this article)

Myanmar's already fragile domestic stability has been further undermined by this soft coup attempt and the subsequent high-risks game being played out through Suu Kyi and Shwe Mann's public alliance against the government. The country has been mired in the [world's longest-running civil war](#) (despite the [uneasy truce](#) signed at the end of March), but on top of that, it's recently had to deal with the continued threat of another [Indian cross-border military intervention](#), the rise of a "[secular ISIL](#)", and a [South Asian "Kosovo"](#) in Rohingyaaland.

There's no doubt that Myanmar can ill afford a split in the government at this critical moment of its history, but that's apparently what's happened with Shwe Mann and his affiliates' purge from power and their subsequent alliance with Western 'darling' Suu Kyi and her [hyper-nationalist Buddhist thugs](#). It's not yet ascertained what extent of influence Shwe Mann had prior to his removal as USDP chairman (although it can be inferred that his hold on the military wasn't as substantial as some believe since he ultimately failed to accomplish Suu Kyi's constitutional gambit), but one must assume that he still has some allies and support among the general masses, especially since he had been so publicly groomed for what was expected to be his next imminent position. Joining forces with Suu Kyi is intended to connect each of their respective support bases into an on-the-ground social superstructure that could pose a serious threat to the government, both in terms of the upcoming elections and any possible [Hybrid War](#) provocations immediately afterwards.

Here's the upcoming three-step sequence of events that observers should monitor in order to gauge the government's strength amidst this heightened asymmetrical threat:

1. Does The Government Blow The Whistle?

Right now the government has the prerogative over whether or not it labels Shwe Mann and Suu Kyi's earlier secret alliance and constitutional initiative as the soft coup attempt that it really was. From the looks of it, it doesn't appear as though they will, but nonetheless, one should still prepare for what would happen in the event that they decide to take action:

Yes:

Calling out the earlier soft coup attempt (and Shwe Mann's intended presidential puppet status for Suu Kyi) would allow the government to commence a formal crackdown against the two conspirators and their supporters. It would also add some clarity to the confusion that's pervaded the country ever since Shwe Mann's dismissal from the USDP chairmanship. On the one hand, this could mollify the masses that are unsure about what exactly had

happened (and thus susceptible to Suu Kyi and her network's false and politically self-serving 'victim' explanation), but on the other, it could potentially scare some in the population who are fearful of a crackdown and genuinely (and naively, it must be said) in support of both individuals.

The latter could push them closer towards making the decision to actively participate in any forthcoming destabilizations organized by their idols or in their name. Also, on the international front, identifying the previous events and secret relationship as a soft coup attempt would earn universal condemnation from Myanmar's new 'Western friends', which would surely threaten to re-impose sanctions amidst any crackdown against their proxies. The question thus becomes whether or not the Myanmar government is able to sovereignly assert its interests in the face of such economic and destabilizing threats, as well as the degree to which Western capital has become a controlling factor in the country's future.

No:



Parliamentary speaker Shwe Mann.

In the most likely of the two scenarios, the government will refrain from labelling the events as a soft coup attempt and will allow the Suu Kyi-Shwe Mann alliance to play out as far as possible, short of calling for a Color Revolution against the authorities. Of course, it might be much too late by that time for the government to effectively deal with these domestic destabilizers and what they've unleashed, but it appears as though Naypyidaw is too scared of earning the consternation of its 'Western friends' to take any further resolute action at this time.

If the West accuses it of 'backtracking on democracy', then it's really implying that it'll cut the country off from access to Western markets and finance, on which it appears to be betting its future. It's telling, then, how far Myanmar has come in the past couple of years since it's 'democratic decision' in 2010/2011, as the 'Old Myanmar' wouldn't have batted an eyelid at what the West would have said about any potential crackdown, but the 'New Myanmar' is seriously apprehensive about what could happen in this regard. Of course, it doesn't mean that the country has lost all of its sovereignty (after all, they did expose the soft coup attempt without calling it that), but that its capacity to take independent decisions in regulating its domestic affairs is now seriously limited by what the West will say and do in response and how this will reflect on Myanmar's 'international' (Western) reputation.

1. Shwe Mann's Fate

For the time being, Shwe Mann has been [allowed to retain his seat](#) as parliamentary speaker, likely due to the considerations outlined previously about Myanmar damaging its 'international' (Western) reputation by taking any resolute steps against him (despite his open anti-government alliance with Suu Kyi). That could of course change, however, if the government happens to indict him on charges of corruption or any other possible crime that they could link him to, which in any case, whether or not it's actual or staged, would be for the implicit purpose of punishing him for his soft coup attempt and earlier secret Suu Kyi conspiracy. Therefore, Shwe Mann's fate is important to consider when forecasting what could happen in Myanmar in the coming months, since he has basically become the highest-serving 'opposition' politician in the government seemingly overnight, and his dismissal

from leading the USDP has become a matter of international (Western) attention (purposely so, it might be added). Here's what it would mean if he were charged with a crime or allowed to remain operating with impunity:

Charged With A Crime:

Going after Shwe Mann with any sort of legal charge (no matter how justified) will lead to a knee-jerk reaction from the West, which would accuse Naypyidaw of using the matter as a cover for political repression prior to the elections. This is exactly the type of rhetoric that the government seeks to avoid, but still, going about punishing Shwe Mann via the indirect mechanism of an anti-corruption investigation, for example, could stave off any conversation about reintroducing sanctions and leave the rhetoric solely at the level of tough-sounding talk and nothing more. It's a risk, that's for sure, but it might be one that the government is willing to take if it doesn't have the self-confidence to directly accuse Shwe Mann of conspiring a soft coup against it. This is of course the lesser effective of the two options, but it would indicate that the authorities view him and his alliance with Suu Kyi as a threat, and that while they can't touch the Western 'darling' without receiving a surefire reprimand from their mutual 'Western friends', they do have the liberty to do so with Shwe Mann and set a precedent for other likeminded internal conspirators that might come after him.

At the same time, it must be noted that taking any sort of legal action against Shwe Mann would lead to Suu Kyi and her followers (including her external patrons) immediately transforming him into a type of 'persecuted pro-democracy' icon, similar to Suu Kyi's own artificial and carefully crafted narrative. Her history of imprisonment would make this campaign all the more effective and resounding on the 'international' (Western) and some of the domestic audiences, since the country's first 'persecuted pro-democracy' icon would basically be lionizing her spiritual successor.

When the 'first martyr' anoints the 'second martyr', it would create a second level of 'political holiness' for Shwe Mann and turn him into the focal point of negative 'international' (Western) coverage about Myanmar. In fact, if it proceeds fast enough, it could even be the fuse needed for the West to begin threatening the re-imposition of sanctions in order to publicly humiliate the government by forcing a political concession out of it over the issue. Therefore, taking legal (non-coup-related) action against Shwe Mann is a double-edged sword that could go both ways for Naypyidaw - on the one hand, it could beneficially provide a plausibly deniable justification for getting him out of the way and setting a precedent to any other anti-government cells embedded within the highest levels of the establishment, but on the other, it could prompt the same type of Western sanctions talk that the authorities are desperately keen to prevent.

Allowed To Operate With Impunity:

Should the authorities refuse to take any further action against Shwe Mann and allow him to freely operate with impunity, then it would undoubtedly embolden the Suu Kyi-Shwe Mann alliance to continue pressing their limits against the government. Most worrisome, however, is that it would demonstrate the level of fear that the government has of upsetting its 'Western friends', thereby confirming the analysis that Western capital has become too influential in the country and its future planning ever since it was reintroduced to Myanmar after the 2010/2011 'democratic transition' first began. In this case, while Naypyidaw might hope that its lack of punitive action against Shwe Mann might make his Western handlers

(whether direct or indirect in this role) pleased to the point of reconsidering their soft coup ambitions, it would surely be proven wrong, since those same forces would actually be motivated to pump *more* money and resources into fulfilling the secret regime change goal that they so nearly achieved before the failed gambit exposed its true nature.

1. The General Election

The upcoming election will take place on 8 November, and the event is expected to be one of monumental importance for the entire country. Because of Myanmar's relative media and information opacity, it's not possible to accurately predict the outcome of the vote (especially given the new Suu Kyi-Shwe Mann alliance that threatens to shake up domestic politics), but it's much more easier to identify the three categories of parties that are competing against one another and their distinct characteristics:

"The Opposition":

This category is composed of Suu Kyi's NLD and may involve Shwe Mann and his supporters as either an official part of the organization or as a candidate or figurehead for a new, NLD-controlled front party. Should the latter come to be, then it would function as an electoral outlet for dissatisfied USDP supporters unhappy with the establishment, yet hesitant to support the NLD and Suu Kyi. Additionally, it's expected that the typical voter profile for both the NLD and any prospective Shwe Mann-affiliated party would be the ethnic majority Burmese population, with additional appeal being seen by those of a nationalist tilt. Given the NLD's track record, it can be surmised that the party and its possible Shwe Mann proxy might attempt to stage another Color Revolution in the event that they don't achieve their envisioned electoral success. This scenario is especially worrisome for the government, since it's already well aware of what happened the last time it tried to squash such an uprising in 1989, and all evidence in since 2010/2011 points to its extreme reluctance to repeat this course of history. For these reasons, the NLD and Shwe Mann hold a commanding influence over the stability of Myanmar immediately before and after the elections, and the initiative is on their side over whether or not they'll throw the country into chaos.

Ethnic-Minority Nationalist Parties:

The next group of parties competing in the upcoming election could accurately be described as ethnic-minority nationalists composed of the country's myriad non-Burmese citizens. These groups are forbidden from explicitly supporting separatism as a prerequisite for their legal status and participation in the elections, but it's an open secret that some of them might be planning for this end (especially in the event of a total state collapse). Officially, however, the 11 ethnic armies fighting the government are part of the [United Nationalities Federal Council](#), so it can be understood that their affiliated political branches (such as the Shan Nationalities Democratic Party and Chin National Party) are in favor of federalization (not separatism) as well.

These groups might rightfully be fearful of the NLD's hyper-nationalist Buddhist thugs and thus not vote for the party, even if it does offer the best possible way for reaching their federalist ends as soon as possible. They also don't support the ruling party either, but the USDP could in hindsight be seen as responsible for their participation in these same elections because of the lax attitude it and its military members have taken towards the creation of ethnic-minority parties (perhaps in an attempt to split minority voters from the

NLD). Thus, it can be thought that this political category believes it can work within the system to eventually transform the fragile truce into a lasting peace, but only on the condition that there's no incentive to spoil the progress achieved thus far and that the military remains united and stable enough to counter them if they decide to do so. Should the 'temptation' arise to break the truce and an opportunity be seen to strike against the government when it's at its weakest and most vulnerable (e.g. putting down a Color Revolution), then an immediate resumption of Unconventional War against the authorities is very likely.

The Establishment:

The ruling establishment is represented by the USDP, and its message is as simple as the two emphases placed in its name - solidarity and development. The government wants to keep the country running smoothly, albeit on tract for an eventual transition into a political system more representative of Western 'democracies' than before. How far it intends to go in this direction is another matter, but it's very possible that the momentum it's unleashed is no longer fully controllable and could take the country down a path that its military overseers hadn't initially intended. This party is the one with the most to lose in the upcoming elections, since the combination of the Suu Kyi-Shwe Mann alliance and a possible upsurge of ethnic-minority nationalism will predictably steal votes away from it, but it's uncertain at this point to how much of an extent this will be. Still, given that this is still the (military) establishment's only political vehicle, it's all but guaranteed that it will somehow 'manage' to become the official majority force in parliament, despite these formidable electoral challenges against it.

Concluding Thoughts

Doing a cross-analysis of the three political categories described in the above-mentioned section, the government's worst nightmare becomes dreadfully apparent - an outbreak of Hybrid War initiated by an NLD/Shwe Mann Color Revolution which quickly evolves into a simultaneous all-out return to Unconventional War in the peripheral provinces.

The reasons for this fear are obvious, since the NLD/Shwe Mann political forces have already been proven to have conspired together during June's failed constitutional gambit, which foreshadows that a second regime change attempt is imminent, albeit one that most likely won't be as 'soft' or secret. It can thus be expected that this would take the form of a Color Revolution, which is why Suu Kyi was imprisoned in the first place back in 1989. The domestic political calculus (in line with the geopolitical one) has changed since then, however, and now it seems as though the government doesn't want to do anything that could be inferred as 'suppressing' her 'political rights', and this raises the clear-cut danger that it might not act against her and her cohorts until it's far too late.

By that point, it would require a more muscular military response, as well as the imperative to temporarily refocus military attention away from the tense, rural provinces and over to the rebellious, uprising cities. This is precisely the incentive that the ethnic-minority nationalist parties and their armies need to recommence their Unconventional War in these very same areas that the military had to neglect for the moment, with the resultant Hybrid War (Color Revolution in the cities, Unconventional War in the countryside) stretching the military to the breaking point and either necessitating a return to martial law (and subsequently, full economic rejection by the West and the immediate re-imposition of sanctions) or the complete collapse of the state.

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