

USA–Myanmar relations: democratization and beyond

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162

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to examine the USA’s policy toward Myanmar or Burma, analyzing the bilateral relationship between the two countries from the pre-colonial period to the present day. It highlights the implications of political shifts in the system of government in Myanmar for the bilateral relationship with the USA, particularly after the 1962 coup and the emergence of rising regional powers like China. The paper also shows how the economic role of Myanmar has increased, leading to more equal relations with the United States of America.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper employs a qualitative research design, analyzing data from both primary and secondary sources. The methodology includes a literature review and document analysis to gain a comprehensive understanding of the USA–Myanmar bilateral relationship. The research also analyzes political and economic developments in Myanmar and the region, placing the USA policy in a broader context.

Findings – The research finds that the USA has been an influential player in Myanmar’s politics and economy. However, with Myanmar’s integration into the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative and its accession to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), its economic role has become more significant, leading to a more balanced relationship with the USA. The paper also shows that the USA’s policy toward Myanmar has undergone significant changes, particularly after the 2011 easing of sanctions by former President Barack Obama.

Originality/value – Although many works have traced the history of USA–Myanmar ties, this study provides a fresh perspective by setting past events against the backdrop of contemporary geopolitical upheavals, therefore highlighting the complex evolution of their bilateral dynamics. The paper contributes to the literature on the USA–Myanmar bilateral relationship by providing a comprehensive analysis of the relationship from a historical perspective. The research also adds to the discussion of the implications of political and economic developments in Myanmar for the bilateral relationship with the USA. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and scholars interested in the USA’s role in Southeast Asia and its relations with rising regional powers like China.

Keywords USA–Myanmar relations, Southeast Asia, Political transitions, United States of America’s foreign policy

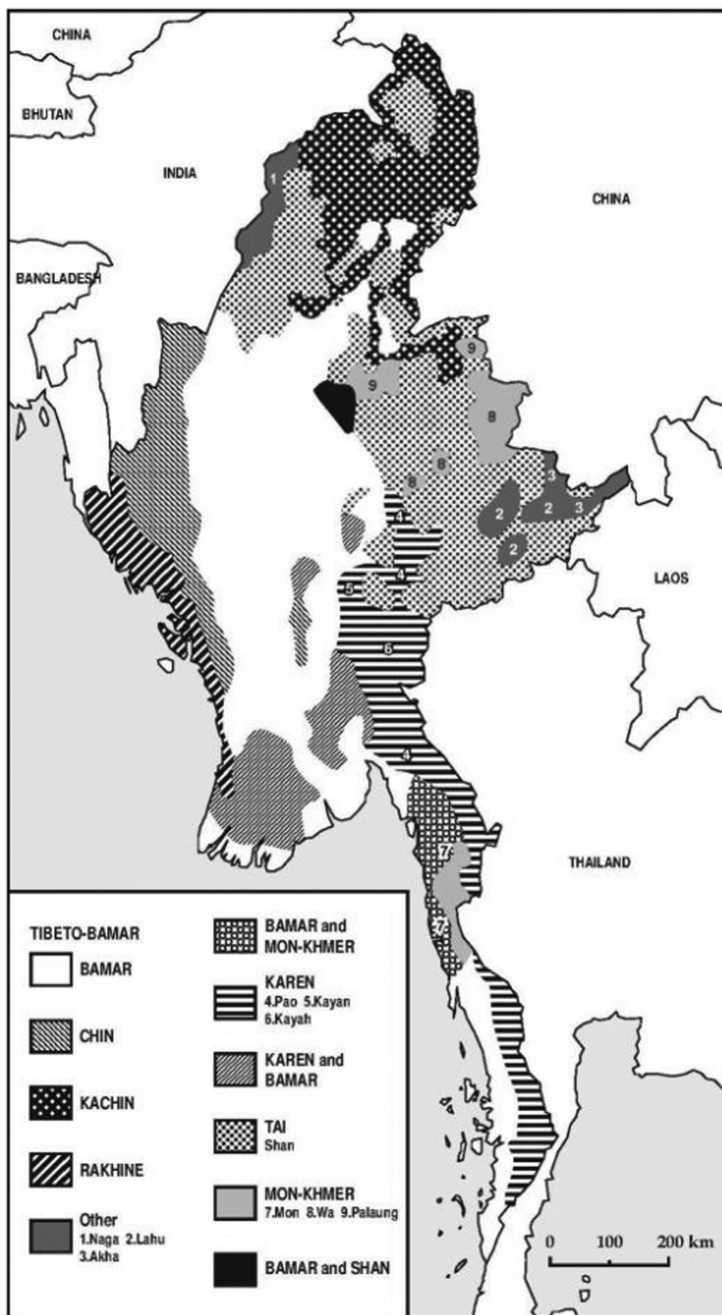
Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Myanmar, strategically located in Southeast Asia, borders China, India, Thailand, Laos and Bangladesh. Its history includes colonialism under Britain and three Anglo-Burmese wars (1825, 1852 and 1885). Following the Panglong Agreement in 1947, Myanmar gained independence in 1948 with Sao Shwe Thaik as president and U Nu as Prime Minister (Holliday, 2014). The country is home to a complex mosaic of different religious and ethnic groups, which can be seen in Figure 1.

Its modern political landscape has seen coups, tensions and the declaration of martial law in 1948. External military support came from India, Britain and the USA. U Nu’s party triumphed in 1960, but due to governance issues, the military seized power in 1962. The





Source(s): The Politics of Silence

Figure 1.
Religious and ethnic
distribution in
Myanmar

Burma Socialist Program Party (BSPP) ruled from 1962 to 1988. Following unrest, the military again took over in 1988, facing international sanctions. The State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) was formed, aspiring for democratic reforms. Despite the National League of Democracy (NLD), led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, winning the 1990 elections, the military drafted a new constitution instead (Than & Hlaing, 2010, pp. 133-57).

SLORC, renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997, initiated the “Seven-Step Road Map” in 2003, with international collaboration including the “Bangkok Process.” By 2010, the SPDC held elections and transitioned to “the Republic of the Union of Myanmar,” introducing a new flag. The Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) secured 76.5% of seats in the 2010 elections. The United Nation’s (UN) Ban Ki-moon praised this transition, and by 2011, Myanmar pursued reconciliation, promoting democracy and regional economic openness.

In 2016, the NLD party, under Daw Aung San Suu Kyi’s leadership, triumphed. U Htin Kyaw became president, emphasizing reconciliation and a federative constitution. Following the 2015 elections, sanctions on Myanmar were lifted and international support surged. However, U Hla Maung Shwe believes achieving peace requires dedication and dialog (Yingqiu, 2017). The journey to democracy, evidenced by Indonesia’s success, is lengthy (Paing, 2015, p. 11). Daw Aung San Suu Kyi sees Myanmar transitioning, but Thant Myint-U fears illiberal democracy (Kiyaseh, 2018). U Htin Kyaw emphasizes the importance of the democratic transition’s journey over speed. The aspirations for a federative constitution are further detailed in the Myanmar Federal Charter of 2021, which aims to address some of these longstanding issues (see Figure 2 for Myanmar Federal Charter 2021).

The relationship between the United States of America and Myanmar has been previously analyzed, shedding light on key occasions and strategic decisions. This paper, however, aims to connect the dots between occurrences that at first glance appear unrelated in order to provide new light on the nuances of their developing relationship. This paper examines the USA–Myanmar relationship before and after the democratic transition and touches on the USA role in achieving the democratic transition. The paper deals with the USA sanctions and

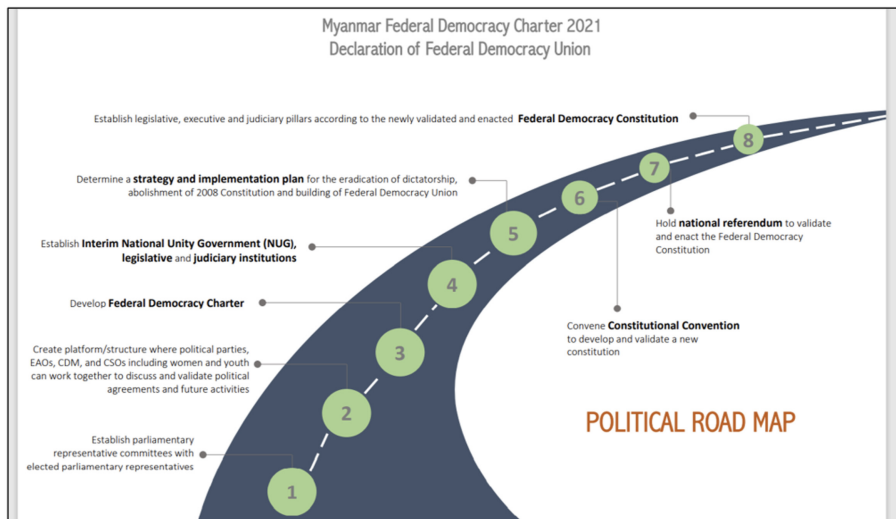


Figure 2.
Myanmar federal
charter 2021

Source(s): Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CPCS), illustration of the 2021 Federal Democracy Charter, Part-I, Chapter III

openness policies on Myanmar and their feasibility. This study is important because it deals with a large and attractive topic for scholars from a neutral point of view and based on Western and Burmese sources. The study is based on a historical analysis of the bilateral relations between Myanmar and USA. The study answers the following questions: what is the position of Myanmar in the USA foreign policy and the extent of its priority for the United States of America? What is the reason for the USA concern about the democratic transition in Myanmar? What is the USA role in the democratic transition in Myanmar?

This qualitative case study makes use of a wide range of analytic lenses to examine USA foreign policy toward Myanmar, the USA–Myanmar relationship and the political upheavals in Myanmar. In addition to including secondary sources like scholarly commentary, historical records and expert analysis, we draw on primary sources like policy papers, government pronouncements and first-hand stories. The goal is to guarantee that all facets of the situation are fully grasped. Therefore, this paper was based on political and security reports and books specialized in the research topic, in addition to referring to interviews with policy makers and letters directly related to the research topic. We collected the data by visiting libraries, visiting official Burmese and USA Government websites, accessing books available online as well as some journals specialized in Southeast Asian affairs, and we benefited from some interviews available on online sites such as YouTube and others. The study compares the USA–Myanmar relationship before and after the democratic transition. The study is based on historical data, government information and data resources, speeches, interviews and internet sources. This study is important in the field of USA relations with Southeast Asian countries, as the United States of America is an influential military power and owns the largest economy, and the USA–Myanmar relationship has gone through many ups and downs due to the nature of ruling regimes and the multiple revolutions that took place in Myanmar. In addition to Myanmar's strategic location close to China and India and overlooking the Bay of Bengal. This study is intended for policy makers interested in Southeast Asian affairs and USA–Myanmar relations, junior scholars and students.

The study deals with the era of political transformation in Myanmar after its independence and describes its political relationship with the United States of America after independence. This paper refers to the USA foreign policy toward Myanmar and the USA interest in this country. Then the paper presents the obstacles to democratization in Myanmar and the nature of the relationship with the United States of America under non-democratic regimes; and ends with conclusions and recommendations.

1.1 Results

The USA was interested in Myanmar during the Cold War period because of its location between China and India. The bilateral relationship reached the height of the dispute in 1988 at the time of the military coup, which opened the door for the SLORC to take over the ruling on 18 August 1988. The council made many reforms in all fields. It was in this period that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi emerged as a major political actor and formed the NLD, albeit under house arrest. Government faced challenges after the 1988 pro-democracy uprising and Saffron Revolution. Myanmar and some other Southeast Asian countries, such as Cambodia, have been subject to USA sanctions. The political and economic failure in governance, in addition to the violation of human rights, led the USA to adopt a harsh policy toward Myanmar. The pressure of the USA did not bear fruit with the United Nations and ASEAN. The United Nations is an international organization that cannot take sides, and ASEAN was aiming at economic networking among the group of ASEAN countries without interfering in internal affairs (Kipgen, 2012, pp. 100-11).

The 18-month duration of this study's data collecting began in January 2020 and ended in June 2021. About 120 documents were carefully examined during this time, including reports,

academic articles and original materials relating to the democratic process and USA–Myanmar relations. This all-encompassing investigation guaranteed a deep comprehension of the changing dynamics and made it possible to form an educated opinion on the matter.

2. Political transitions in Myanmar after independence and the nature of its relationship with the United States of America

The USA–Myanmar relationship started during King Bodawpaya's reign (1782–1819) with the USA eyeing Myanmar's resources, especially petroleum. Although the UK predominantly exploited these, missionary Adironam Judson bridged USA–Myanmar ties by creating the English–Burmese dictionary in 1826.

Official ties commenced on 19 September 1947, with Myanmar achieving independence on 4 January 1948. USA President Harry S. Truman and Ambassador Satterthwaite both expressed optimism about their nations' relationship during the Cold War era (Clymer, 2015, p. 10). Practicing positive neutrality, Myanmar sought international aid, including a USA development loan in 1950.

Post-1949, with China turning communist and Chiang Kai-shek's retreat, the USA aimed to counter communism in Southeast Asia. The intertwined nature of politics, warfare and narcotics in the region is evident in Chiang Kai-shek's dealings in the Golden Triangle (Gibson & Chen, 2011). Given Myanmar's sensitive border with China, it became pivotal for USA policy in Southeast Asia. The USA granted Myanmar \$10 million in 1950 but faced Myanmar's refusal in 1953 due to its support for the Chinese Kuomintang forces in Myanmar, which threatened China and Myanmar itself (Steinberg, 2009, p. 47). Simultaneously, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) got involved in the Golden Triangle's opium trade, with Myanmar being a major heroin source for the USA (Meehan, 2015).

The Kuomintang forces' advancements in Myanmar during 1952 led to a 1953 UN complaint by Myanmar. In response, the UN advocated for foreign force disarmament. By 1961, the Kuomintang withdrew, and in 1962, Myanmar saw a political shift, adopting positive neutrality. However, the USA perceived this as a blow to Myanmar's democracy.

From 1962, Burma faced global scrutiny due to human rights abuses, authoritarian rule, forced labor and increasing heroin trafficking (Robertson, 2005). Between 1947 and 1988, the USA donated \$86.6 million to combat drug trafficking in Myanmar (Steinberg, 2001, p. 216). Despite allegations of Myanmar's economy relying on drug trade and money laundering, evidence was inconclusive (Steinberg, 2001, 217). The SLORC pushed for economic openness, promoting democracy through multi-party elections.

Despite the NLD's victory in 1990, SLORC dismissed it, citing concerns of national division (Clapp & DiMaggo, 2013, p. 14). USA–Myanmar relations soured from 1998 to 2008 as the USA supported the NLD. Military and humanitarian aid was suspended from 1988 and military training ceased between 1980 and 1989 (Clymer, 2015, p. 10). The USA discouraged international loans to Myanmar and insisted on a government change following electoral disrespect (Haacke, 2006). Relations worsened when Myanmar declined Frederick Vreeland as USA ambassador in 1990 due to critical remarks (Steinberg, 2010, p. 182). Subsequently, the USA limited its diplomatic representation (Nicolaus, 2015, p. 22).

The SPDC introduced a "Seven-step Road Map" in 2003 aiming at democratization. The USA opposed this, criticizing Myanmar for false claims about Aung San Suu Kyi (Haacke, 2006, p. 68). Diplomatic relations further deteriorated as Myanmar pulled its Washington ambassador in 2004 (Wee, 2020). USA officials like Condoleezza Rice and President Bush lambasted Myanmar's governance, with Bush proclaiming the country a significant threat (Haacke, 2006, p. 68). Sanctions included entry bans on Myanmar military officials and discouraging USA investments (Steinberg, 2001, p. 216). In the 2000s, trade restrictions were fortified and assets were frozen, citing human rights abuses (Bureau of East Asian and Public Affairs, 2010).

Bush's UN General Assembly speech highlighted the USA's dismay with Myanmar's human rights situation. While the USA pressed for UN resolutions on Myanmar, vetoes by Russia and China blocked them. With Obama's 2008 election, bilateral relations began improving, marked by an openness to dialog with non-democratic nations.

The USA maintained a rigid stance toward Myanmar from 1988 to 2008, mainly supporting the NLD; the party was unrecognized by the military despite its 1990 election win (Steinberg, 2001, p. 216). Aung San Suu Kyi became a democracy icon, and the USA backed groups pushing for regime change (p. 116). Relationships between China and Myanmar are complex, as Steinberg and Fan (2012) show. Interdependence and difficult choices are highlighted as they talk about the past, current geopolitical climate and economic relations between the two countries.

The USA initiated economic sanctions on Myanmar in 1988. By 2004, economic relations had halted, with aid and investments cut off. Laws and decrees, such as the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act and the Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts (JADE) Act of 2008, solidified these sanctions (Martin, 2011, p. 1-25; Nicksch, 2007, p. 13). After President Bush's 2001 election, he sustained the USA's strict policy toward Myanmar, criticizing its governance and human rights record (Bush, 2001; Myers & Hauser, 2007). The USA increased sanctions, rejecting Myanmar's "road map" for reforms. Some Americans believed this might augment China's influence in Myanmar (Steinberg, 2003).

USA concerns over Myanmar escalated, culminating in a 2006 Security Council vote addressing Myanmar's situation (Kipgen, 2013, p. 203-16). Although the USA's motion passed, China and Russia vetoed a subsequent resolution, with China insisting Myanmar's issues were domestic (Nicksch & Weiss, 2007, pp. 13-4). As China backed Myanmar, USA–Myanmar dialogs ensued in 2007. The 2008 JADE Act fortified economic sanctions under the Bush administration (McDonald, 2009).

3. The motives of USA policy directed toward Myanmar

Southeast Asian nations hold historical importance to the West since colonial times due to their strategic positions and natural resources. Post-World War II, their relevance grew commercially and economically. Myanmar, bridging China and India, has become crucial for facilitating global trade and especially for China's Belt and Road Initiative. As such, superpowers like the USA and China are keen to forge ties with Myanmar.

Khriezo Yhome highlights the significance of the Bay of Bengal, underlining factors like China's southern focus, Myanmar's emergence, the bay's rich resources and growing regional networks (Yhome, 2015). Through Myanmar, China can easily access the Indian Ocean, raising concerns for the USA and India (Malik, 2020). With the bay being a route for 50% of containerized shipping and 70% of oil supplies, Myanmar's positioning becomes central (Ignatchenko, 2012). This is further illustrated by the Bay of Bengal Initiative (BIMST-EC) and the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Forum (BCIM), which aim to bolster economic integration.

Several strategic projects, like the Special Economic Zones in Kyaukphyu, Thilawa and Dwei, have emerged, with China investing heavily, especially in Kyawphyu. Recognizing Myanmar's strategic value, India invested in the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Sittwe, while Myanmar also collaborates with Japan and Thailand (Boot, 2013). With these developments, Myanmar's policy amplifies connections between South Asia and Southeast Asia. Yhome further contends that increasing connectivity will transform economic geography, fostering regional integration and emphasizing Myanmar's role as a trade connector between China, India and ASEAN (Verma, 2013).

During the Nargis cyclone, a partnership emerged between ASEAN, the UN and Myanmar, suggesting a shift in Asian cooperation dynamics (South, 2008, pp. 16-7). Despite USA sanctions, Myanmar and China bolstered their economic, military and political ties.

China consistently aided Myanmar. Although democratic, India didn't mimic Western sanctions on Myanmar. While the USA fostered relations with most ASEAN countries, Myanmar remained an exception. This led to speculations of a USA–China tug-of-war over Myanmar. The Obama administration emphasized that their approach was grounded in human rights and not in rivalry with China (Ming-Te & Liu, 2011, pp. 96-119). Clinton clarified that the USA didn't see their involvement as a competition with China.

A 2011 Georgetown University conference suggested USA sanctions inadvertently increased Myanmar's reliance on China (Harrington, 2012, p. 133-9). The close Myanmar-China ties posed strategic challenges to the USA in Southeast Asia. Under Biden, the USA might review its Myanmar strategy, potentially aligning with Obama's pragmatic approach to counterbalance China and reinforce USA–ASEAN relations (Zreik, 2021b). The USA aims to democratize Myanmar, encircling China with democratic nations, which explains their outreach to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. Part of the US's motivation might be to disrupt the strong China–Myanmar ties (Yonghong, 2014, p. 10).

Yun Sun in 2014 remarked on the prevalent competition between the USA and China concerning Myanmar since 2011. Dai Yonghong perceived the USA's strategy as containing major powers, China and India, around the Indian Ocean. Chinese elites recognize the USA's efforts to pull Myanmar away from their orbit. Experts like Lintner, Zaw and Haacke use terms such as "US-China Great Game", highlighting Myanmar's central role in the international influence struggle in Southeast Asia. Myanmar's ASEAN role and the strengthening ties of USA allies like India and Japan with Myanmar have prompted the USA to intensify bilateral efforts with Myanmar (Chalk, 2013, p. 1).

During the Cold War, the USA supported right-wing factions in various countries, including Myanmar, to counter the Soviet Union and communist expansion. Given Myanmar's proximity to China, the USA saw it as a critical defense line against communism. Myanmar was neutral during the Cold War, favored trade with China, especially due to indirect USA backing of the Kuomintang (Steinberg, 2006, p. 223). USA aid to Myanmar often halted due to sanctions, with a focus on drug control in the Golden Triangle region during Nixon's administration (Clymer, 2015, p. 3). From 1988-2001, the USA's Myanmar policy concentrated on human rights, noting Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's significant mentions in USA records (Steinberg, 2010, p. 45).

China's consistent aid made Myanmar lean toward it. The USA sees Myanmar as strategically valuable in Southeast Asia for its resources, market and labor. Ambassador H.E. Scot Marciel emphasized the USA's desire for a democratic Myanmar (Kaspar, 2016; Al Shaher & Zreik, 2022). While Myanmar evolved into a key market for China, the USA aimed for a similar economic footing. Sanctions on Myanmar escalated in the late 1990s and early 2000s, with Clinton and Bush both imposing measures.

After a hiatus since 1955, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar in 2011, followed by President Obama in 2012, marking improved relations (Zreik, 2021a). The 2015 democratic elections furthered this, with suggestions for the USA to enhance aid and promote democracy in Myanmar.

In 2012, the USA relaxed restrictions on Myanmar, promoting democracy. By 2015, USA assistance increased, emphasizing education. President U Thein Sein's 2013 USA visit, the first in decades, led to significant trade agreements (Thant, 2013). Advocates like Senator Mitch McConnell urged for reduced sanctions in light of Myanmar's reforms (McConnell, 2013). Clapp and DiMaggio highlighted Myanmar's challenges and its dire need for global integration (Clapp & DiMaggio, 2013, p. 14).

In 2016, President Obama lifted all sanctions on Myanmar, acknowledging its strides in democracy and human rights. This aligned with the USA's strategic pivot to Asia, aimed at countering China's influence (Manyin *et al.*, 2012, p. 2). Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted past sanctions had limited effect on the Burmese Junta (Landler, 2019). She revealed a policy

review during her Indonesia visit (Kipgen, 2013, p. 209). Obama's approach differed from predecessors, emphasizing diplomacy and communication, which catalyzed Myanmar's political transition.

In 2009, Myanmar's U Thaug and the USA's Kurt Campbell initiated bilateral discussions, culminating in prisoner releases, lifted visa bans and "pragmatic engagement" (Kurlantzick, 2010). Recognizing Myanmar's reforms, Clinton restored normal bilateral relations and appointed an ambassador. Following Myanmar's democratic elections in 2012, Derek Mitchell became USA Ambassador (Kipgen, 2013, p. 203-16). That year, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal during her USA visit.

Trade between the U.S. and Myanmar surged from \$196.9 million in 2015-2016 to \$690.6 million in 2016-2017 (export.gov, 2018). Ambassador Scot Marciel highlighted the positive impacts of lifting sanctions and the potential for bilateral economic growth. Since 2012, the USA granted over \$500 million to aid Myanmar's transition, benefiting food security and agricultural productivity (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2010). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID's) 2016 funding for Myanmar focused on community development, governance, peace, economic growth and health (Zreik, 2021c). Additionally, the USA dedicated \$5 million to the "Golden Palace Monastery Conservation project" in 2014 and fostered various training programs in Myanmar and Hawaii.

4. Challenges to democratization in Myanmar and bilateral relations with the United States of America

In 2015, Myanmar held pivotal elections, with the NLD party winning a majority, leading to U Htin Kyaw's presidency. This win was recognized by the USA, which commended Myanmar's democratic strides and welcomed Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as Prime Minister. Unlike previous elections, international observers, including the Carter Foundation and European Union (EU) representatives, were allowed to monitor. President Kyaw pledged national reconciliation, a democratic constitution and improved living standards for the populace.

USA officials' visits to Myanmar surged, reflecting the USA's commitment to support Myanmar's democratic transition and address ethnic issues (Hiebert, Audrey, & Phuong, 2016, pp. 14-5). Harding and Fuchs emphasized the importance of engaging with Myanmar's military and resolving the Rohingya crisis, considering Myanmar's rich resources and potential economic gains for the USA (Harding & Fuchs, 2016; Liu, 2020). During a UN Assembly, President Obama ensured that USA sanctions wouldn't restrict investments in Myanmar and reintegrated Myanmar into the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP), which benefits developing nations. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi encouraged economic partnerships, emphasizing mutual benefits (Kipgen, 2017).

However, Trump's presidency saw a shift in USA foreign policy. His "America First" strategy and disengagement from global agreements marked a distinct departure from Obama's approach, especially toward East Asia (Diamond & Collison, 2016). While Trump's interest in Myanmar was comparatively muted, suggestions were made to engage more robustly to counterbalance China's influence (Hiebert, 2017). Notably, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Myanmar in 2017, signifying continued USA–Myanmar relations, albeit less pronounced than under Obama.

The military coup that took place in Myanmar on February 1, 2021, was a major setback for the country's efforts to move toward democracy. Several members of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party, including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, were detained by the Tatmadaw, Myanmar's armed forces and a junta was installed. The world community as a whole, and democratic nations in particular, blasted this decision.

The coup posed a significant obstacle for the United States of America in its relations with Myanmar. The military takeover was swiftly condemned by the Biden administration, and sanctions were placed on the responsible military officers. In February 2021, the United States Department of the Treasury blacklisted eleven individuals and three companies for their ties to the military machinery that orchestrated the coup (Tarrow, 2022; Noorashid, Mohamad, & Trisnawati, 2020).

This coup demonstrates, once again, how precarious democratic transitions may be. The U.S. is in an awkward position after investing considerable diplomatic resources into strengthening ties with Naypyidaw under the Obama administration in the hopes of securing Myanmar's democratic transition, only to see the country revert to military rule. Myanmar's foreign policy dynamics are complicated by the military's return to the forefront. Given the long history of sanctions and international condemnation, the Tatmadaw views Western nations, the United States of America in particular, with extreme caution. At the same time, Myanmar's geopolitics, especially its significant border with China, means that it cannot afford to completely alienate any major power.

As a result of the 2021 coup, not only did the political landscape in Myanmar change, but so too did the calculations of U.S. foreign policy toward the country. It highlights the need for subtle diplomacy and the fine balancing act of advancing democratic values while negotiating the intricate geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The presented study examines the USA–Myanmar relations from Myanmar's independence in 1948, emphasizing its geo-strategic location between nuclear powers and its internal ethnic conflicts. This study draws parallels between Myanmar and other countries like the Balkans and Vietnam, stressing the recent shifts from democratic governance back to military rule, making Myanmar's geopolitical position critical in the USA–China competition in Southeast Asia. Unlike prior research, this work uniquely combines historical and contemporary geopolitical considerations. Though much has been written on USA–Myanmar ties, we stress that our study is the first to integrate historical nuance with contemporary geopolitical shifts. We think this better illuminates the complexities at play in their bilateral ties by providing a full narrative.

This study, by analyzing multiple sources via a critical analytical perspective, highlights the intricacies of USA–Myanmar relations. Their bilateral ties are complex, reflecting the interconnected nature of their political upheavals, the changing position of USA foreign policy and the broader global geopolitical movements. Despite the interpretive difficulties introduced by the breadth and complexity of the themes covered, this study aims to provide a rounded picture. Myanmar, post-independence, navigated various challenges, including USA-imposed sanctions leading to years of internal strife on ethnic and religious fronts and economic challenges. While its democratic transformation was notably peaceful compared to other global movements, Rakhine State's human rights issues persisted. Despite these challenges, Myanmar has actively cooperated with international entities like United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and ASEAN on regional issues.

USA–Myanmar relations have seen fluctuations: starting with an improvement in 2008, significant support from the Obama administration, a domestic focus under Trump and expectations of enhanced engagement under Biden. The recent military coup, possibly a result of diminished USA priority under Trump, underscores the region's volatility. While the USA holds significance in Myanmar's democratic transition, there is an argument that broad USA sanctions have impacted the Myanmar public more than the intended military targets. Notably, after the NLD party's electoral victory, the influence of anti-Western nations was

evident in the subsequent military coup. The recent coup suggests that Myanmar's security and political situation remains precarious, emphasizing the need for balanced international relations. The study recommends exploring the implications of the February 2021 coup and suggests that the international community, especially entities like the United Nations and ASEAN, play an active role in resolving the crisis, potentially through means like a popular referendum.

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