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## Myanmar: Constitutional Amendments: The Army Bares its Fangs!

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When the NLD pushed for Constitutional Amendments, the Myanmar Army (Tatmadaw) responded that the Army is not against Constitutional Reforms but it was only objecting to the way the motion had been presented in the Parliament without following the procedures.

This was repeated time and again and one would have thought ( not this analyst) that Army will finally bow to wishes of the people and would be flexible enough in its approach towards Constitutional Reforms.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> February, the Army made yet another move to give this impression by naming eight Representatives for the 45-member Joint Committee being set up to examine Constitutional Reforms.

The question was- Why did the Army make a U turn in nominating members for the Joint Committee they denounced? The only reason is that the Army did not want the Joint Committee to get away with the 'agenda' of the NLD without having its say in the matter.

The USDP the proxy of the Army consisting of retired Generals followed suit by nominating two of its members for the Committee.

The Army did not fail to indicate through its Representative that it is not going to accept the report of the Committee as the ratio of "representation" is not fair and the resulting report will not be complete!

But the Army through two Press Conferences on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> February revealed its true intentions and gave a blunt warning that the Army

will not leave its political role till peace and stability vis a vis- the Ethnic Armed organisations are restored. This is not likely to happen in the near future with a new front in the East that has just been opened up against the Arakan Army and one of the eight armed organisations (the KNU) who signed the peace agreement staying out of the peace process for the present.

The fear is as I see it- with the Army clashing openly with the NLD, do we see the beginnings of the Army going once again for taking over the Country?

In a Press Conference on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, Maj. Gen. Tun Tun Nyi said and it is worth quoting- “ We hereby would like to repeat once again that we are not objecting to Constitutional Reforms but we object to the action of (of forming a committee) which is against Constitutional Rules and Parliament Bye-Laws.”

He added that the Military will not accept any amendment that harms the essence of the Constitution ( does he mean military domination?) or any of the basic 48 principles of the Union stated in the Charter on Chapter 1. ( The NLD’s response was that it was not a move for an amendment but for merely creating an all-,inclusive Committee to review it for potential Reforms.

More and Direct was the warning given by Maj. General Soe Naing Oo, Co-Chairman of the Tatmadaw True News Information Team the next day. He said clearly that the Tatmadaw will get out of politics only when there is no Ethnic Armed Organisation and ‘eternal’ peace is achieved.

While quoting the Army chief who had said that the Army would get out of Politics when the country’s political path is stable, he talked about the Army being the only institution that is stable in the country.

He said “In Myanmar the Tatmadaw alone is a strong institution (what arrogance!). I would like to tell you all to accept the fact that the Tatmadaw is working for the success of the democratic transition in order that the country does not veer from the democratic path in the time of democratic transition”

The question is – who is to decide when there would be peace and stability? Who has the key to ethnic reconciliation”? It depends on the Army. Therefore, why should the Army go for giving up politics and power when it can manage the ethnic insurgency at certain level – not boiling over – or totally removed?

In riposte, the NLD Secretariat member Nyan Win declared in a Press Conference that the Constitutional Tribunal alone can decide whether the Constitutional amendments conform to the Constitution or not. In a direct reference to the Army’s position he said – “The talking point whether the Constitutional amendment is in conformity with the Constitution or not, is just an “opinion”.

Meanwhile, the ethnic conflict in the East with the Arakan Army has intensified with heavy casualties on both sides. There were a number of

clashes in three locations near the Sittwe-Yangon highway in Mraunk-U Township starting from 19<sup>th</sup> Feb.

There appears to be full public support for the Arakan Army and there is an open call by the Arakan Army Representatives to the people to come forward and join the Army and take up brand new weapons they possess.

The military representative in the Arakan State legislature made a strange appeal. He urged the Arakanese public to support the military's objectives in the region- that the military always protects the lives of the public and protect race and religion in Rakhine State and always protects the Arakanese from the danger of "Muslim Attacks". The response of the Arakan Army was on expected lines. It termed the appeal as ridiculous and would mean acknowledging the great losses of the military in the ongoing battle and solid evidence of lack of support of the Public for the Army!

From the Indian point of view, the intensified war close to its border between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar Army need to be closely monitored. It is said that the ultimate objective of the Arakan Army is take over at least five townships in the Rakhine State by 2020. Reports indicate that three companies of Indian Security Forces have been rushed to the Mizoram border to prevent conflict from spilling over to the Indian side. If the Arakan Army consolidates its position and takes control of its territory, the possibility of Indian insurgent groups trying to find shelter in such areas cannot be ruled out. This needs to be carefully handled.

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