

ASEAN Trying to Resolve the Situation in Myanmar

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On April 24 this year, in Jakarta, the capital of Indonesia, a special meeting of the presidents and heads of government of ASEAN member countries was held to discuss the latest developments in Myanmar, which itself is a member of this Association, uniting 10 countries in the Southeast Asian region.

The occasion for these high officials to add to their concerns about the problems in their own countries some external problems, was the high-profile international consequences of the events that [took place](#) in Myanmar on February 1 this year.

Let us briefly recap what this is about. Today’s Myanmar (formerly the “Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma”), rich in a variety of natural resources and now occupying a very important strategic position, is a very complex country. It is populated by about 100 ethnic and religious nationalities, often at odds with each other and with the central government. Armed clashes are not a rare thing.

It is equally important to recall that since the second half of the last century, the inaccessible mountainous regions of Myanmar were one of the main elements of the so-called “Golden Drug Corner,” which supplied opiates to the world markets on a huge scale. Currently, Myanmar’s Shan State (the main area of separatist anti-government armed struggle) is the leading supplier for methamphetamine markets.

The “Drug Factor” tends to be carefully circumvented by the Western media in commentary on recent events in Myanmar. Meanwhile, its significance in the “Great World Game” as a whole (at least of the last century and a half) still seems grossly underestimated. In particular, this is directly related to the Afghan issue.

In any case, it is the sum of these factors that explains why independent Myanmar has been led by the military up until the most recent period of its history. This alone made it possible to preserve the integrity of the country and carry out positive socio-economic transformations.

But the same circumstance has always been the main reason for the “West’s” (very

conditional) negative assessments of the state system of Myanmar. This negativity was particularly harsh after the Myanmar military, led by General Min Aung Hlaing, once again went “behind the backs” of the country’s civilian leadership.

The most frequently cited reason for the events of February 1 is the result of the general elections held in November 2020. As a result, the National League for Democracy won a constitutional majority of seats in the country’s parliament. This jeopardizes the legal basis (still preserved in the current constitution) for the military’s de facto control of the situation in Myanmar.



It is important to note the fact that **Aung San Suu Kyi**, who until relatively recently was one of the main icons of the global “human rights” movement, heads the NLD. This latter has dramatically changed attitudes toward her since she became the de facto head of the civilian government and began to pursue a domestic political course not much different from Min Aung Hlaing’s policies.

But after the military once again locked up Ms. Suu Kyi on February 1 (apparently simply because they doubted her ability to keep the situation in the country under control), the patented “human rights defenders” like Amnesty International, as well as their real puppeteers, went “off the rails”.

Although today, when Washington and Brussels (the unelected officials of the latter for some reason position themselves as the “voice of Europe”) are promoting propaganda hysteria about “hundreds of peaceful protesters killed by the military junta,” let us not lose sight of the very factor of simmering or quite active internal armed conflicts. For example, in late April it was reported that armed Karen (the third largest ethnic group in Myanmar) [seized an army base](#) on the border with Thailand.

Be that as it may, the prospect of another “humanitarian intervention” looms on the horizon. Potential participants could be a number of countries (perhaps all of them) that have recently conducted joint naval exercises La Perouse in the Bay of Bengal, the entire eastern coast of which is composed of Myanmar. Which, of course, would not go unanswered by the PRC.

But no one wants to see a new, extremely dangerous “hot spot” in the Indo-Pacific region, and the main players in the game here have recently been calling (directly or covertly) for ASEAN to intervene in the situation that is unfolding in Myanmar.

In particular, such a desire can be seen in the US-Japanese joint statement [adopted](#) after the April 16 talks in Washington between **Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga** of Japan and US **President Joe Biden**. The document refers to the “central role of ASEAN” in Southeast Asian affairs and, almost immediately thereafter, “strongly condemns military and police

violence against the citizens of Myanmar”.

Note, however, an important feature of ASEAN, which fundamentally distinguishes this association from the EU. Unlike the latter, whose officials unceremoniously interfere in the affairs of all countries of the Union (and not only), the governing apparatus of ASEAN has so far avoided interfering in the internal affairs of member countries. In this regard, the initiative to hold a special summit of the Association on the situation in Myanmar, which was launched on March 19 by Indonesian **President Joko Widodo**, is unique. Apparently, her main motive was to avoid the worst-case scenarios in the region involving the world’s leading powers.

It is worth noting the media fuss (initiated by the same “West”) on the eve of the discussed event around such procedural issues as the format of the meeting and address to the incoming leader of the current military leadership of Myanmar, **General Min Aung Hlaing**. There were proposals not to invite a delegation from this country at all, arranging a kind of “visiting court” over its leadership.

But as you can see [from the photos](#) at Jakarta airport, Min Aung Hlaing, who arrived for the summit, was treated quite traditionally, decently and, importantly, with the WHO recommended precautions necessary in these dangerous times of coronavirus.

The special ASEAN summit lasted two hours, without the presence of the press and apparently in the usual ASEAN “family” format. That is, one member of the “family” (who found himself in a predicament), in the person of the same General Min Aung Hlaing, was given both grievances and advice. At the end of the [meeting](#), only the president of Indonesia allowed himself to make some harsh remarks about the military leadership of Myanmar in public. Which the addressee most likely did not hear, much less respond to in any way.

In this connection, note that unlike today’s “right-wing” Pharisees, Asia has not lost what is commonly called conscience. How can Philippine **President Rodrigo Duterte** condemn the Myanmar military when he himself has to resort to means that do not fit in any way the “rules of etiquette” of “human rights activists” in the fight against disastrous domestic problems (especially in the drug trade).

The author would like to emphasize that Duterte received a mandate of trust of his own people during the [general elections](#) of 2016 to use similar means (previously tested by him when he was governor of a province of the country). In this act of democracy (without quotation marks) he did not resort to the services of “political technology” crooks. Which is the norm in countries of triumphant pharisaism.

The Jakarta summit resulted in a [nine-point](#) Statement, published on behalf of the ASEAN Secretariat. It seems noteworthy that only the last two paragraphs are devoted to the main reason for the event.

Commentators also drew attention to the absence of a demand in the Statement (spelled out in a preliminary draft document) for the current Myanmar leadership to immediately release all civilian political activists detained after the coup. This means that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi will continue observing events in the country she recently led, on TV at her home (seating in a cozy armchair).

Apparently, General Min Aung Hlaing politely listened to all the friendly (and not so friendly)

family advice and suggestions in Jakarta. But he will likely continue to act in accordance with his own answer to the traditional question of “what is good and what is bad” for his country.

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