The events occurring in Burma, where numerous street demonstrations have not subsided against the military, which took power into its own hands on February 1, 2021, continue to attract intense attention. The fact is that although a change from civilian to military power has taken place, it is absolutely unclear how events will further develop: whether the military will be able to retain power or, under the pressure of mass demonstrations and a split in its own ranks, Aung San Suu Kyi and her party members will return to power.

So far, the situation has been characterized by the fact that President Win Myint and Aung San Suu Kyi, the president of the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) party who served as both minister of foreign affairs and state counselor, as well as hundreds of functionaries and activists with the ruling party, remain under arrest. But on the other hand, the scale of, and bitterness marking, the protests against the military are only increasing.

Many of those observing the Burmese political process believe that the situation is reoccurring which developed after the so-called democratic revolution of 1989, when, after the impressive victory the NLD had had in the general elections, the party was banned and removed from power by the military, and all public speeches in support of it were suppressed extremely brutally. The military, led by Senior General Than Shwe, either arrested, exiled to isolated, hard-to-reach places, or even simply shot almost all those who were disaffected, and for decades made sure that they had complete power.

But the similarity between the current coup and the one back then is actually purely superficial, since Burmese society has changed a great deal over the time since 1989. This has been particularly noticeable recently, when the
Military agreed to cede power to the civilian government. Western countries and the United States repealing the sanctions that the military regime lived with for decades paved the way for foreign investment and technologies that poured into the country from Japan, the United States, China, and ASEAN countries. A real economic boom began in Burma, one in which the growth rate for national GDP over the last several years has remained at the level of 5-7%. Due to the increase in the level of the country’s national wealth, small- and medium-sized businesses started to spring up, new industrial organizations appeared, and trade turnover, the standard of living, and the level of consumption have risen noticeably. Since 2011, per capita income has grown from 900 to 1,600 USD. Riding on the wave of the economic changes, the position held by the NLD has become reinforced, and it attributes all these successes to how correct its policy is. This party, having become dominant, managed to create its own cells throughout the country, and its activists were fully prepared for the struggle for power with the support of the most educated and prosperous among the population.

In order to somehow reassure the country’s population, the military has already announced that parliamentary elections will be held in the country in a year. However, it’s not yet clear which parties will make it to the table for the NLD leaders to change the constitution – setting up a so-called “democratic transition” - that means sidelining the army and its representatives from the real government for good. Within the country for quite a few years opponents of the military have created so-called “fields of tension”, when under the influence and with the direct participation of Western non-profit organizations (NGOs) a “civil society” was formed in the country as an alternative to the military in power.

It is obvious that today the situation in the country is at an obvious dead end, and the military, headed by Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, is running up against an extremely urgent issue: what should it do next, in the face of stiff resistance from the Burmese society that absolutely does not want to do a U-turn back to the reality present from 1980s to the early 2000s? For most people, this time is associated with poverty, incompetence, the omnipotence of the military bureaucracy, and subordination to the strict rules imposed by the military. In order to somehow reassure the country’s population, the military has already announced that parliamentary elections will definitely be held in the country in a year. However, it’s not yet clear which parties will make it to them. In the meantime, the new regime is trying in every possible way to block access to the Internet, and to shut down news channels and social media networks. It is doubtful that it will succeed at doing this, and most likely the military will agree to once again officially ban the NLD. But then nobody would recognize the upcoming elections in a year as legitimate, and various sanctions from abroad would immediately ensue.

However, on the other hand, a sensible politician and military leader like Min Aung Hlaing understands that he should not hand power over to the liberals, even on terms that have been agreed upon. There is no doubt that the...
NLD, without the support of the military, will not be able to cope with the long-established armies fielded by numerous ethnic minorities like the Chin, Kachin, Mon, Shan, and Karen peoples, who are just waiting for right time to resume the civil war. In addition, it is not clear whether the democrats will be able to keep the drug lords in check and prevent the next "golden triangle" from being reincarnated in the Burmese northeast.

So both the military who came to power and the democrats who were ousted from power face a very difficult choice - one on which the country’s future depends. The chance to reach a compromise has not been lost yet. In addition, to resolve the conflict, a third force has to be involved, and namely representatives of the reputable Buddhist sangha in the country. The main thing now is to revive the dialogue among Burmese in society that has been lost, and allow both sides to find a way to save the country.

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