

Commentary from Burma Campaign UK

The international community has yet to develop a strategy for effectively promoting human rights under the new political structure in Burma, which now has two power bases, the military and the National League for Democracy-led government. Neither of which is respecting human rights.

Escalating violations of international law by the military

On Saturday 1st October 2016, the Burmese Army fired six mortars into Pu Wang village in northern Shan State. The bombs killed a 2 year old child, Mang Shang Zung Myaw, and seriously injured a 5 year old and a 6 year old child.

The attack was barely reported in Burma, let alone internationally. Attacks like this by the Burmese Army are so common, they don't make the headlines. It's just what happens.

Step back and think about that for a moment. After years of reforms, after the lifting of sanctions, after the praise lavished on the military for their reform process, it is still so commonplace for the Burmese Army to bomb a civilian village and kill a child that it barely warrants a mention.

Eight days later, attacks on police border guard posts in which nine policemen were killed prompted a major military crackdown in Northern Rakhine State. The Burmese Army's so-called clearance operations have left more than 30,000 people displaced, and there are credible reports that dozens of women have been raped and hundreds of people killed. There are reports of babies and children being thrown into burning homes that the Burmese Army has torched. Food supplies have

been destroyed and unknown numbers arrested and tortured. Aid has been blocked to tens of thousands of Rohingya who were already living in squalid conditions and not getting enough aid. By now people will be dying, children first. We don't know how many as journalists and aid workers are banned from going to these areas.

Many of these human rights violations meet the legal definition of crimes against humanity, and some legal studies state they could also meet the legal definition of genocide.

Embracing the military

While these horrific human rights violations were taking place, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, the man ultimately responsible for these human rights violations, was enjoying a tour of European Union countries, and attending a meeting of the European Union Military Committee-EUMC Meeting, the highest level EU military forum.



Min Aung Hlaing at the EU Military Committee-EUMC Meeting.

As his soldiers raped Rohingya women and burned villages, Min Aung Hlaing met military heads and defence ministers in Italy, and went sightseeing in Rome and Venice. He boasted that the visit was for: “further promotion of bilateral ties and cooperation between the two armed forces of both countries, exchange of goodwill visits, and issues of cooperation between the two armed forces in the future.” He was even taken to visit a manufacturer of military vehicles, and taken to a military aircraft company involved in the Eurofighter Typhoon jet. He enjoyed a tour of their factory.



Min Aung Hlaing enjoys sightseeing in Venice.



Min Aung Hlaing meets military aircraft company Leonardo.

It's not just the EU which is ingratiating itself with the Burmese military. The USA, Australia and other countries are also building closer relationships with the military, and inviting them to observe joint military exercises. The British government is providing free training to Burmese Army soldiers. The Burmese military are being brought in from the cold, even as the human rights violations they commit are increasing.

For the past few years the approach of the international community has been one of soft engagement, hoping the military will have a gradual epiphany and realise it is in their own self-interest to agree to further reform.

Recently Aung San Suu Kyi appears to be taking a similar approach, attempting to persuade the military that she, and a democratic government, are not a threat to their interests. It is perhaps to this end that she is uncritical of their actions in Rakhine State, Shan State and Kachin State, even defending them domestically and internationally. It could partly be for this reason that she has appointed more current and former military people to key government posts than she has NLD members. And why she has told MPs that debating and questioning the military budget is out of bounds.

Members of the international community don't appear to have a clear strategy for how to address the new political situation in Burma. Some still talk about the need to 'reward' the military for the reforms undertaken. This argument never made much sense. All the reforms in Burma have been on the military's terms. Not once have they responded to domestic pressure or pressure from the international community to change in any way the transition plan and political landscape that they laid out in their 2008 Constitution. They were being 'rewarded' for ignoring the international community and sticking to their own plan.

The 2008 Constitution is based on the presumption that the NLD will win a landslide in the elections, and makes provisions to ensure military interests are preserved when they do so. A smooth transition was an essential part of a plan the military have been implementing for almost ten years. They have as much at stake as anyone in the process, they designed it. The last thing the military want to do is retake direct control over the government of Burma. Their plan has worked perfectly.

Even if there was merit to the 'reward' argument, it is passed now. The reform process is over. The 2008 Constitution has now been implemented. The military have the political structure they want in place, and are refusing to allow further democratic reform.

THE COUP THREAT MYTH

A persistent myth since reforms began is that the military are somehow looking for an excuse to re-take direct control over the government.

Broadly there are two schools of thought on this. One is that the NLD-led government, activists, and the international community must tread very carefully to avoid provoking the military and prompting a military takeover.

The other is that the military are deliberately creating crises that could be used as a pretext for retaking power. While it is likely that they have and will continue to look for opportunities to undermine and weaken the NLD-led government, it is extremely unlikely they would want to retake direct control. It would undermine their interests to do so.

Understanding the military is critical. Past characterisations of them being crazy and superstitious have now been exposed for how wrong they were. In various forms, the military ran Burma for more than 50 years, far longer than most regimes last. There have been some bumpy transitions of leadership during this time, and the odd purge, but overall, despite personal rivalries, they have stayed disciplined and united. Their effectiveness and ruthlessness in dealing with opponents in Burma as well as within their own ranks helped ensure their longevity in power.

When a combination of domestic and international pressure finally did force the military to accept reforms would need to happen, they did so slowly, at their own pace, and on their own terms. They did not negotiate with anybody. They brought in a new constitution which would guarantee that they still controlled the key levers of power in the country, would have the legal power to retake control, and could veto any attempts at further reform which might threaten their power and interests.

They kept control of police and security forces, of key ministries, of their budget, of the general administration department, and of their huge business interests.

The November 2015 election was the culmination of their careful transition plan to a new political system in Burma, which they see as essential to their survival. The constitution was designed knowing an NLD election landslide was likely. Hence the guaranteed seats in parliament, the high bar for changing the 2008 Constitution, and military appointed ministers. They needed the election to go smoothly, and they need a smooth handover of power.

The military have been embraced and praised by the international community. Things are going well for them. Retaking direct control would undermine much of what they have achieved. They are fully aware that if they did so, there would be mass protests in Burma and the approach of the international community would change. It is not in their interests to do so.

In any case, the military can use any pretext for retaking control. Aung San Suu Kyi circumventing their Constitutional ban on her becoming President to appoint herself State Counsellor was a red line issue for the military, but they have reluctantly accepted it.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing himself recognises the value of the perception by some that the military are itching to retake power. At least once a year he makes a reference to constitutional provisions that allow the military to retake direct control.

Some governments may also be using this argument as a fig leaf for their inaction.

This false bogeyman must not continue to be used as a reason for inaction, allowing horrific human rights violations to continue.

At the present time, the military are the obstacle to reform, not the facilitators of it. They will not allow Constitutional reform. They are responsible for the majority of serious human rights violations taking place in Burma. They are the main obstacle in the peace process succeeding. Why is the language of rewards still being used?

The other argument being used is the need for engagement. No-one is opposed to engagement. Engagement is essential. The question is, which kind of engagement is effective?

The current approach is one of soft engagement. It is seemingly based on a belief that just by bringing the military into the welcoming arms of the international community, and exposing them to professional armies, while at the same time ending their supposed isolation and their being able to see the benefits of change, will encourage them to agree to further change.

This isn't working. This has never worked. Ever. Human rights violations which could break international law are on the increase. Those promoting this approach are left clutching at straws.

The presumption that a professional military is one which respects human rights is not borne out by current or historical evidence. There are numerous examples of professional military bodies that either run or are under brutal regimes. The Burmese military has seen substantial budget increases since 2011. This money has not been used to professionalise the military, but it has been used to modernise it. New heavy weaponry has been purchased which is being used in ethnic states, in conflicts where civilians are being targeted and killed.

Proponents of the soft engagement approach also highlight how the military allowed a smooth handover of power after the NLD won a landslide in the elections. In doing so they are praising the military for following their own plan, instead of responding to calls from the international community and people of Burma to change the Constitution.

As already described, the military have not budged at all from following their own agenda, a top down reform process negotiated with nobody except themselves.

The fact that Min Aung Hlaing is being given tours of arms manufacturers suggests the prospect of future arms sales may also be a driving factor in the softly softly approach towards the military.

The more the military are welcomed into the arms of the international community, the more sanctions are lifted, the more UN engagement on human rights is lifted, the more they are praised for reforms, the more their confidence grows that they can continue to commit human rights violations and block democratic constitutional reform with impunity.

Premature decisions based on wishful thinking

Just how badly the international community has got it wrong is shown by their approach in the weeks running up to the latest Rohingya crisis. The evidence was there, the warnings were there, but they were ignored.

In June 2016, a report by the High United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights - Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar – stated the following:

“The information received by OHCHR suggests that minority groups have suffered a wide range of human rights violations and abuses. Moreover, in the context of armed conflicts, reports over many decades have documented violations of international humanitarian law allegedly committed by the military and armed groups. If established in a court of law, some of these violations could amount to war crimes.”

In all the years of conflict in Burma, this was the first time the United Nations has been so direct in describing human rights violations as war crimes.

On the Rohingya, the conclusions were just as serious:

“The situation described above reflects a pattern of gross human rights violations that affect

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fundamental civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Rohingya. Widespread discriminatory policies and/or practices targeting them on the basis of their ethnic and/or religious identity have led to an acute deprivation of fundamental rights. Many of the acts described would suggest a widespread or systematic attack against the Rohingya, in turn suggesting the possible commission of crimes against humanity, if established by a court of law.”



Barrier segregating communities in Rakhine State

Rather than consider what new steps can be taken to end such violations of international law, the international community moved in the opposite direction.

The 2015 UNGA resolution on Burma contained 17 paragraphs with recommendations to the government of Burma and the military for improvements in human rights. The only one which has been met related to a smooth transition to a new government following elections. Outstanding areas where action has not been taken by the government and/or military include releasing all political prisoners, bringing all national institutions, including the military, under democratic civilian control, ending arbitrary arrest and detention, ending forced displacement, ending rape and other forms of sexual violence, ending violations of international humanitarian law, establishing a country office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, implementing agreements to end the use of child soldiers, addressing trafficking, ensuring

Rohingya have access to full citizenship, freedom of movement, and civil and political rights, and investigating human rights violations against Rohingya to ensure accountability.

Yet in 2016 the Resolution was discontinued.

Since the NLD-led government came to power earlier this year, much of the international community took the approach that the job of the international community in promoting human rights and democracy was pretty much done. Alok Sharma MP, the British Foreign Minister with responsibility for Burma said as much in a recent article entitled ‘Celebrating Success with Aung San Suu Kyi’:

“Among the throngs of world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly Secretary General Ban Ki-moon held a meeting to celebrate the conclusion of his partnership group on Burma – their work is complete.”

Just eight days after making this statement, the death of a two year old child at the hands of the Burmese Army is evidence that their work is far from complete. A week after that, the mass human rights violations against the Rohingya provided further evidence.

There are a wide range of reasons why much of the international community is prepared to play down remaining human rights problems in Burma. These include domestic political considerations, geopolitical concerns, trade interests, and a general global trend of human rights moving down the foreign policy agenda.

Efforts to present Burma as a country which has reached a stage in a transition to democracy that has now moved to a technical assistance and support stage are at odds with the reality on the ground. While there are now a great many areas where progress can be made, there are also many problems left unresolved, and the Burmese Army is responsible for the majority of these. The international community needs to change its approach so that it can differentiate between the two. It needs to provide assistance and support in some areas, and maintain and even increase pressure in other areas.

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The lifting of most remaining sanctions by the US, the decision by Ban Ki-moon to end the UN Partnership Group on Burma, and the decision by the EU to discontinue the UN General Assembly Resolution on Burma, are examples of how the international community is using a one size fits all approach to a complex human rights situation.

Small positives

Citing public commitments to peace made by the military bears little credibility when at the same time they are waging war. Promises to respect human rights are broken as soon as they are uttered, as they have been for decades.

There have been recent cases, rare occasions, when the military have taken action in response to violations, which are used as 'evidence' of change by the military. One case involved an 8 year old girl raped by a soldier, who was then convicted in a civilian court. Another relates to seven people from Mong Yaw village who disappeared after being detained by the military. The military later admitted five of them were tortured to death, and the soldiers responsible were put on trial.

These steps are welcome, but for every case like this there are a thousand where impunity continues, including high profile cases such as the killing of journalist Ko Par Gyi in 2014 and the rape and murder of two Kachin schoolteachers in 2015.

Small steps like this cannot be claimed as evidence that there is any significant change in the attitude towards the military regarding human rights. They do provide evidence though that the military does care more about its image with the Burmese public. This is a potential point of leverage.

Military blocking democratic reform

The Burmese military, through their 2008 Constitution, have ensured that they are independent of the government, while still controlling key government ministries and setting their own budget. Through their seats in parliament they are able to veto any constitutional change to reduce their power and move Burma towards a full and genuine democracy. They have consistently stated that they do not see the need for constitutional change. As far as the military are concerned, the reform process is over. There will be no further transition towards democracy.

Such is the sensitivity regarding Constitutional reform that it has pretty much dropped off the NLD agenda.

Military committing other human rights violations

In April 2016 the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon reported that the Burmese military were continuing to recruit children, and use child soldiers in conflict. Recruiting and using children under the age of 15 as soldiers is prohibited under international humanitarian law and is defined as a war crime by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The UN and local community organisations have continued to document the use of rape and sexual violence against women and children, including a 5 year old girl, by the Burmese Army. This meets the legal definition of a war crime and a crime against humanity.

Military undermining the peace process

Through a combination of military attacks and hardline negotiating positions, the military is the biggest obstacle to peace.

At the Panglong II peace conference, Min Aung Hlaing, head of the Burmese Army, repeated the military position that ethnic armed groups have to abide by the 2008 Constitution, one of the military's 'six principles for peace'. This would require armed ethnic groups to place themselves under the control of the Burmese military, and require them to give up on more autonomy for ethnic states as this requires constitutional change which the military have rejected.

If the military continue to stick rigidly to this position, it will make a long term political solution to tackle the root causes of conflict impossible to reach. This threatens the entire peace process.

Ethnic political and community leaders repeatedly make a point seemingly ignored by the international community and many politicians in Burma, that if the Burmese Army was committed to peace as it states, it could simply stop its military offensives. It is the Burmese Army which is the main aggressor in the conflict, and which has been breaking ceasefires.

Attempting to kick the can down the road on human rights violations by citing the peace process will only be possible until the peace process itself hits a crunch point where the military obstruct any further progress by blocking constitutional reform and insisting armed ethnic organisation come in under the 2008 Constitution. And what happens if the NLD-led government negotiates a ceasefire which armed ethnic organisations agree to, but the Burmese military keep waging war?

Unless the military change their approach, peace will be impossible.

What next for military engagement?

A key question now for the international community is how to influence the Burmese military, which as ever, is the main obstacle to democratic reform and improving human rights in Burma.

The international community needs to develop an approach towards the Burmese military with two clear goals in mind. First, how to persuade the military to stop committing human rights violations, and second, how to persuade the military to agree to constitutional change which will enable the peace process to succeed, and which will allow further democratic transition in the country.

The military will only agree to change when they decide it is in their interests to do so. At the current time, they have little incentive to reduce human rights violations or agree to further democratic reforms. They have in place the system they designed to protect their interests and give them control over the areas such as security and defence which they believe that only they are able to guarantee the safety and security of the nation.

On the domestic front, the military will only come under significant pressure to change their behaviour when civil society, religious and political leaders join and mobilise public opinion. Even then, on issues of constitutional reform, the military are likely to resist. But on issues of conflict and human rights abuses, there may be opportunities. This is why many ethnic people have been critical of Aung San Suu Kyi over her failure to strongly speak out over human rights violations in ethnic states. She has the capacity to mobilise and influence domestic and international attention and opinion, which in turn could lead the military being under significant pressure to reduce abuses. She can act as a source of pressure rather than as a shield.

Her current approach of reaching out to the military appears to be bearing little fruit. While she has established relationships with some in the military, her efforts to reach out to and work with the higher echelons, including Min Aung Hlaing, have not been successful. During the Rakhine crisis, she has been unable to persuade the military to lift the new restrictions on aid which they have put in place. Nor have they been persuaded to soften their stance on the peace process. It is probably only a matter of time before more serious divisions emerge, and in the meantime opportunities to reduce human rights violations will be lost.

It is not just the Burmese military who are using Aung San Suu Kyi as a shield to deflect criticism. The international community are using her position on the military to defend their inaction. The British government repeatedly cites support from Aung San Suu Kyi when faced with questions as to why it began providing free training to the Burmese military without setting any preconditions on human rights.

Providing training without even trying to extract any concessions on respect for human rights is leverage being given away for nothing in return. The same applies with invitations to observe military exercises, visits by navy warships and UN Peacekeeping training. Rewards have their place, but they must come at the right time and in response to the right moves. To throw away the stick and give rewards up front without anything in return discards all leverage. It amounts to a fingers crossed approach that if we are nice to the Burmese military they



will suddenly come around. That is a fundamental misunderstanding of the mind-set of the military. They have a very clear idea of their role in Burmese politics and society, one that is deeply ingrained. It is not the same vision western democracies have of the role of a professional military.

When the EU and USA lifted sanctions they made no differentiation between sanctions which targeted the government and sanctions which targeted the military and their associates. The same applies to discontinuing the UN General Assembly Resolution on Burma. This decision was justified as being in acknowledgment and support of reforms and the new government, without differentiation between the government and the military and their actions.

The current NLD-led government may not be fully supporting human rights but it is in a completely different league from the military, which continues to commit multiple human rights violations which break international law and meet the criteria of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Policy must be based on current human rights violations, not on vague hopes that in a decade or more things might get better IF the military can see it is in their interests. Continuing and escalating violations of international law cannot continue to be ignored.

Opportunities for leverage

It is time for a debate which identifies potential points of leverage on the military and how they can be most effectively applied.

Diplomatic pressure

Current soft engagement where 'sensitive' subjects are avoided or dealt with indirectly or obliquely does not appear to be delivering results. The military know diplomats are going through the motions and there will be no consequences for ignoring them. A change of tone and content should be considered, ensuring the military are aware that friendly relations are dependent on respect for human rights.

Defence attachés provide an opportunity for engagement but this should be focused on promotion of human rights, not promotion of good relations. The removal of diplomatic attachés to countries with bad human rights records, including Burma, has been used in the past to signal displeasure, but can often be little more than a gesture. For example, in the case of Burma diplomatic attachés were removed but American and European companies continued to invest in joint projects with the military government providing them with billions of dollars. There is a risk again that members of the international community, if they do decide to try to exert pressure on the military, will resort to gestures like the removal of defence attachés, without following through by applying other more effective measures. Robust engagement and targeted pressure should be applied before tactics of isolation.

Invitations to high-level military meetings and events should be reconsidered immediately. The application of visa bans to the military and people associated with their business interests is another option.



Much more progress needed from NLD-led government

Although the military is responsible for some of the most serious human rights violations in Burma, and for obstructing further democratic change, the NLD-led government has the power to address a great many human rights violations in the country. The sheer scale of problems inherited by the NLD-led government means that addressing some of these will take time. That said, there are many human rights problems which can be described as low-hanging fruit, easy to address, but which have not yet been addressed.

Aung San Suu Kyi and members of her government have asked for time and patience to address problems. On many issues this is reasonable. However, the international community must start to differentiate between problems which genuinely do need time to address, and those where Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as de-facto leader of the government, can take decisions which either immediately address the problem, or start to address the problem, but is failing to do so. It sometimes appears that the government and members of the international community are deliberately conflating the two.

These include the continued detention of more than 100 political prisoners. Even Lahpai Gam, a Kachin farmer whom the UN has assessed is being detained illegally in violation of international law, remains in jail. Government restrictions on the delivery of humanitarian aid, particularly to Rohingya people in Rakhine State even before the current crisis, also remained in place. Media are facing less freedom, rather than more. Those who criticise the government face arrest and personal attack. The process for repealing repressive laws is far too slow. Failure to act on these issues is unjust, causes immense suffering and is costing lives. In instances like this, it is not just technical advice that will solve this problem.

The approach of Aung San Suu Kyi and her government to the current Rohingya crisis gives even greater cause for concern. In this case, there has not only been inaction. Aung San Suu Kyi and her government have actively supported and defended the military as it commits human rights violations. They have denied abuses are taking place, attacked those who report abuses, denied media access, ensured a journalist reporting abuses was sacked and banned a photographer who documents the Rohingya from entering the country. For long-time observers of Burma, these are all too familiar tactics from the era of direct military rule.

The NLD-led government cannot claim to be one that supports or adheres to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. This is a sad reality that the international community must accept and adapt to if it wants to help the most vulnerable people in the country. It requires a change of approach from the current almost unconditional support being given to Aung San Suu Kyi and her government by the international community.

Military training and exercises

Training of any kind to the Burmese military at a time when it is committing multiple violations

of international human rights law, and refuses to acknowledge it is committing abuses, and at the same time obstructs democratic reform, is very hard to justify. Training by the British government has not even been evaluated for its effectiveness despite hundreds of thousands of pounds being spent on it. Such programmes should be discontinued and only

resumed once specific measurable improvements in human rights have been agreed.

Invitations to observe military exercises are a reward the military have not earned. Governments extending such exercises need to be clear and specific on how such an invitation helps end human rights violations by the military.

Economic pressure

Calls for general sanctions in response to the latest Rohingya crisis are more likely to further antagonise the people of Burma against the Rohingya than help them. There could be opportunities to apply leverage for change through economic pressure, but only if it could be applied in a targeted way in support of diplomatic and other initiatives.

In the past in Burma, sanctions and other forms of pressure were usually only applied in response to an atrocity, such as the crackdown in 2007. The way pressure was applied was as a knee jerk slap on the wrist, rather than as part of any overall strategy or in support of diplomatic initiatives.

Sanctions of various kinds were gradually built up over 20 years, diminishing their impact. The USA, EU, Australia and Canada had various forms of pressure but did not coordinate their actions, not even managing to have a similar visa ban list. Mistakes of the past should not be repeated. Economic or other pressure would need to be coordinated as far as possible with countries willing to apply them. Clear benchmarks and timelines should be set in support of concerted diplomatic efforts to persuade the military to end human rights violations and agree to democratic reforms.

Economic sanctions aimed at military interests could have a role to play in pressuring the military to change. This could include individual companies withdrawing from any contracts or partnerships with military owned companies, and individual countries applying bans on doing any form of business with military-owned companies and members of the military.

Legal pressure

The evidence has been there for decades but only in the past year has the United Nations become more willing to clearly describe human rights violations in Burma as possible war crimes and crimes against humanity. The vast majority of these violations are committed by the military.

There is clearly no credible investigation taking place within Burma into the totality of the situation in Rakhine State, including those responsible for human rights violations since 2012.

A UN Commission of Inquiry should be established to assess the totality of the human rights situation in Rakhine State, including human rights violations against Muslims and Buddhists, identify perpetrators and instigators of violence and hatred, assess laws and government policies which discriminate against the Rohingya, and provide detailed recommendations to improve the situation.

In the short term, the establishment of a UN Inquiry could help curtail some of the human rights violations taking place as the government and military will know that a credible independent investigation is taking place. We have seen in the past that international attention and pressure on human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar can help curtail the scale of abuses taking place.

In the past ethnic civil society and political groups supported a UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights violations in the whole of Burma. It is likely that such calls will grow again in light of the ongoing violations committed by the Burmese Army, including in Kachin and Shan States.



IDPs in Kachin State, forced to flee attacks by the Burmese Army

Many countries are also parties to treaties or have other legal obligations to arrest those responsible for torture, even if the crime happened in another country. Members of the military on trips abroad should all be investigated and arrested if there is credible evidence they have been involved in the use of torture. At the current time, countries are not carrying out such checks on visiting members of the military.

Conclusion

It appears that the hope of some in the international community regarding the Rohingya crisis is that things will calm down over Christmas, that the international outcry will fade, that they can hunker down and things will return to normal. But normal was already unacceptable. The Rakhine Commission chaired by Kofi Annan won't address the abuses committed by the military or the broader human rights and political situation in the country. Another crisis is waiting down the road, and more people will lose their lives.

Human rights violations by the Burmese Army are tolerated by the international community, as long as they continue to take place in ethnic states. It is inconceivable to think that there would be the same muted international response if the Burmese Army had fired six mortar bombs in Rangoon and killed and injured children there.

Would Min Aung Hlaing still have been given red carpet treatment by the EU if his soldiers were burning hundreds of homes and raping dozens of women in Rangoon?

The biggest potential threat to improving human rights and future democratic reform in Burma is the military. They are serial violators of international law. It is time the international community reassessed its approach towards the Burmese military and judge them by their actions, not their words.



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