

The Improvement of U.S.-Myanmar Relations Processes, Reasons and Prospects

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Executive Summary

Myanmar, also called Burma by the United States and the European Union (EU),¹ is an important and mysterious country in Southeast Asia. Its relations with the United States have faced twists and turns since it became independent in 1948. The U.S. recognized its civilian government very early after 1948 and gave it some economic assistance. In March 1953, Burma refused to accept aid from the U.S.² because of its support of the Chinese Kuomintang forces which were retreating to the Shan State in Burma in 1949–50 to fight with the People’s Republic of China and the Burmese government. In 1962, General Ne Win led a military coup and retained power until 1988. During this period, Burma received assistance from the U.S., although the relations between the two countries were not very close.

In 1988, demonstrations spread nationwide in Burma. At this time Ne Win resigned, but the next government did not succeed to control the situation. The military forces cracked down on people and caused heavy casualties. After another coup by the military, the Tatmadaw (the military) came to power in 1988, which was initially called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), the name of the government was changed to the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. The SLORC (later SPDC) held an election in 1990, and the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD) won the election, but the military did not relinquish power and has been in power since then. The SLORC/SPDC then retaliated against the opponents, and sentenced the NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi to house arrest for nearly 15 years.³ In September 2007, the SPDC cracked down on the protestors and caused some casualties. From 1988 to 2008, the relations

¹ The Tatmadaw government changed the country’s name from “Burma” to “Myanmar” in July 1989. The United Nations and many countries now use the latter one, but countries such as the U.S. use the former, because it does not recognize the Tatmadaw government. So “Myanmar” is mainly used in this paper, but “Burma” is also used as quoting some western articles and referring to the country’s name before 1989.

² David I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 47.

³ “Barack Obama calls for Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi to be freed,” *Telegraph*, June 18, 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmamyanmar/7839644/Barack-Obama-calls-for-Burmas-Aung-Suu-Kyi-to-be-freed.html> (accessed on July 4, 2010)

of the military government with the United States deteriorated because the U.S. criticized the military government and imposed broad sanctions. The U.S. ambassador left Burma whilst the Burmese ambassador left the U.S, neither returning to date. In January 2007, the U.S. sponsored a UN Security Council resolution for sanctions on Myanmar, but it was vetoed by China and Russia. The SPDC firmly resisted the U.S. sanctions, and seemed to fear “regime change” conducted by the United States. Actually, the sanctions hurt both sides and their relations failed to improve during this period.

Since the end of 2008, the Burmese government has tried to improve its troubled relations with the United States. The Chairman of the SPDC, General Than Shwe, sent a congratulatory message to President-elect Barack Obama on the occasion of his election in November 2008, which was a strong positive signal. Also, the Obama administration realized that sanctions alone were not effective and it began to review and adjust the U.S. policy towards Myanmar. On March 25, 2009, Stephen Blake, the director of the office for mainland Southeast Asia in the U.S. Department of State, met with Foreign Minister Nyan Win of Myanmar in Naypyitaw. However, bilateral relations were damaged once again when Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to another 18 months house arrest in August 2009, because she allowed the American John Yettaw to stay in her house, and in doing so, violated the terms of her house arrest. The Obama administration seriously criticized Myanmar and renewed the existing sanctions against it. The two countries looked however to the future, continued communicating and overcame the negative influence of this incident and began to conduct high-level meetings. U.S. Senator Jim Webb visited Myanmar August 14–16 and met with Than Shwe, Aung San Suu Kyi, and was able to get the imprisoned Yettaw released. Webb became the first high level American politician in more than ten years to meet with Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi. In September and October 2009, the bilateral high level official meetings occurred more frequently. In order to continue to show its good will, the SPDC released 7114 prisoners on September 17, 2009 and the United States lifted visa bans on senior Myanmar officials. It made it possible for Nyan Win to travel to Washington on September 18, 2009, and Prime Minister Thein Sein could attend the UN General Assembly in New York. He was the highest ranking Myanmar official to address the General Assembly since 1995. At roughly the same time, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific

Affairs Kurt Campbell announced the results of the review of Myanmar policy. The Obama administration would pursue a policy of engagement as well as continuing sanctions that are subject to review in order to help bring democratic change to Myanmar. The U.S. strategic goals and interests are still to support a unified, peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Myanmar that respects human rights.⁴ The Myanmar government quickly responded and eased the control of Aung San Suu Kyi. On November 3-4, Campbell led the first high level U.S. diplomatic delegation visiting Myanmar since 1995. They met with Thein Sein and other senior Myanmar officials as well as Aung San Suu Kyi and some leaders of the NLD, a few ethnic leaders, and some other party leaders. On November 15, 2009, Obama shook hands with Thein Sein at the meeting with the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the first to ever take place with the U.S. president attending. Since January 2010, the bilateral relations began to be harmed again because the elections laws enacted by the SPDC completely eliminated Aung San Suu Kyi from Myanmar politics, which meant that the NLD rejected the validity of the upcoming election. The two countries suspended the process to improve relations but did not end it. On March 18, 2010, Myanmar released the naturalized U.S. citizen Nyi Nyi Aung, who had been sentenced to five years of hard labor for committing crimes in Myanmar. But on May 14, 2010, the White House decided to extend the sanctions imposed on Myanmar by one year, because it considered that the actions and policies of the Government of Myanmar continued to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.⁵ Jim Webb, chairman of the U.S. Senate foreign relations subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific affairs, cancelled his planned June 3 visit to Myanmar because some news said that the country possibly wants to develop nuclear weapons in tandem with North Korea.⁶

⁴ Kurt M. Campbell, "U.S. Policy toward Burma," U.S. Department of State, September 28, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/09/129698.htm> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

⁵ "U.S. extends sanctions on Myanmar," Xinhua News, May 15, 2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-05/15/c_13295623.htm (accessed on June 5, 2010).

⁶ Stephen Kurczy, "Jim Webb cancels Burma visit after report claims junta 'planning nuclear bomb'," *The Christian Science Monitor*, June 4, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/0604/Jim-Webb-cancels-Burma-visit-after-report-claims-junta-planning-nuclear-bomb> (accessed on June 18, 2010). Actually, the U.S. doesn't have hard evidence about the possible nuclear cooperation between Myanmar and North

The main reasons for the U.S. policy change are: a realization that the sanctions were not effective; changing the situation in Myanmar so its interests cease to be weakened; to strengthen the relations with ASEAN; to compete with China's increasing influence in Myanmar and Southeast Asia; to prevent North Korea and Myanmar from developing close military cooperation, which is very important for the non proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in and around Southeast Asia.⁷ The main reasons why the Myanmar government wants better relations with the U.S. are: to improve the possibility of the lifting of sanctions by the U.S. and a reduction in political pressure; having the result of 2010 election recognized by the U.S.; to develop relations with more countries to get more interests. Their bilateral relations have actually made some progress since the end of 2008, but the improvement process has been a difficult one. It is even possible for their relations to reverse. The main reasons are that they have different, even contradictory, values and interests, so the issues of the 2010 election and the exclusion of Aung San Suu Kyi will be real tests for their bilateral relations; the Obama administration faces many difficulties in adjusting U.S. policy towards Myanmar domestically, which made it impossible to make significant moves forward; there is a lack of mutual trust, and the government of Myanmar is suspicious about U.S. goals in Myanmar. But Myanmar has strategic importance and the United States has great influence in Southeast Asia and the whole world, so the development of their relations will affect stakeholders on Myanmar issue such as ASEAN, China and the EU.

Korea , it just suspects that Myanmar wants to develop nuclear weapons.

⁷ The U.S. does not have hard evidence about the possible proliferation of WMD from North Korea to Southeast Asia, it just suspects.

Myanmar Undergoing Great Changes before the 2010 Election

Myanmar is a strategically important and mysterious country to many. Since 1962 it has been ruled by the military. After 1988, when the SLORC (after 1997, called SPDC) took over, the military government has been criticized and sanctioned by the United States and the EU. The struggle between the U.S. and the Myanmar government continued, which has influenced the political and democratic process of Myanmar. The SLORC held an election in 1990, and the NLD won the election, but the military did not relinquish power and has continued to control power up until now. The U.S. influenced the EU to impose strict sanctions and put more pressure on the SLORC/SPDC. With the aim of national reconciliation and enabling democratization, the SPDC declared in 2008 that it would hold a general election in 2010. The SPDC is paying great attention to the election and is preparing for it very carefully. Politically, after the SPDC announced the seven-step roadmap in August 2003, which mainly included the reconvening of a national convention, the drafting of new state constitution, the holding of a national referendum on the drafted constitution, the sponsoring of the general election and the formation of a new civilian government.⁸ In May 2008, the SPDC successfully held a referendum for the approval of the draft constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. The Commission for holding the referendum announced that 92.48 percent of the voters cast a “yes” vote for the approval of the draft constitution.⁹ However, the U.S. and the EU criticized the referendum. For example, the Bush administration condemned it as a “sham,” and claimed that it was a referendum proposed by the SPDC in order to approve a new constitution because the document was

⁸ “Myanmar accomplishes first step of roadmap to democracy as national convention ends,” People’s Daily Online, September 3, 2007, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90777/6253747.html> (accessed on April 7, 2010).

⁹ Aung Toe, “Union of Myanmar Commission for Holding the Referendum Announcement No. 12/2008 7th Waning of Kason 1370 ME,” Myanmar Foreign Ministry, May 26, 2008, <http://www.mofa.gov.mm/news/Announcements/26may08.html> (accessed on April 7, 2010).

drafted without the input of opposition parties or minorities, and the vote, scheduled for May, would be held under “a pervasive climate of fear.”¹⁰

On March 8, 2010, the SPDC published the new election laws governing the general election and appointed the five-person commission responsible for supervising the election. The U.S. government blamed the SPDC because they thought that the election laws barred many opposition figures including the NLD’s leader Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in the upcoming elections. For example, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said the election laws were disappointing and a “setback” for political dialogue and the SPDC’s engagement with Washington.¹¹ On April 15, 2010, when the people celebrated the Thingyan Festival, three explosions ripped through Myanmar’s former capital and biggest city Yangon, killing nine people and injuring about one hundred and seventy. It is unclear who was responsible for this attack, which attracted world attention, but the Myanmar government claimed it was a terrorist attack.¹² The U.S. condemned this attack,¹³ which raised the suspicion of the stability of the pre-election situation.

Furthermore, the SPDC also faces the ethnic armed forces problem. In August 2009, the local army of Kokang Special Region 1 in Myanmar’s Shan State and the Myanmar Tatmadaw forces clashed, which caused many to flee to neighboring China. The main ethnic armies such as the United Wa State Army, the Kachin Independence Army, the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army refused to accept the Border Guard Force plan proposed by the SPDC, which made the relations of two sides very tense. This may have the potential to cause a war.

¹⁰ “United States Denounces Burmese Constitution Referendum as Sham,” U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, February 12, 2008, <http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2008/February/20080212170949esnamfua0.7622492.html> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

¹¹ “Burma election laws a ‘setback’,” BBC News, March 12, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8563870.stmon> (accessed on April 7, 2010). Also on March 8, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said that he had written to Than Shwe, expressing impatience about the lack of progress toward the elections. See Richard Lloyd Parry, “Burma publishes new election laws,” Times Online, March 9, 2010, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article7054903.ece> (accessed on April 7, 2010).

¹² Judy Bretschneider, “Nine Revellers Killed In Triple Bomb Blast,” Sky News, April 16, 2010, <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Myanmar-Bomb-Attack-Kills-Nine-In-Burma-During-Yangon-Buddhist-Thingyan-Celebrations/Article/201004315604776?f=rss> (accessed on April 21, 2010).

¹³ Philip J. Crowley, “Daily Press Briefing,” U.S. Department of State, April 15, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2010/4/140295.htm> (accessed on April 21, 2010).

Actually, the United States is the leading rival to Myanmar, and the EU basically follows the U.S. policy towards Myanmar. So the Myanmar government wants to improve relations with the international community, especially with the United States, in order to have a favorable environment for the election. It even wants its 2010 election to be recognized by the U.S. and the EU. The Obama administration realized sanctions were useless, and it hoped the improvement of the two countries relations would benefit its relations with ASEAN. It wants to use the opportunity of the 2010 election to influence Myanmar's development process and direction.

U.S.-Myanmar Relations, 1948–2008

From 1948 to 1988, U.S.-Myanmar bilateral relations have developed but have also faced twists and turns. Burma became independent in 1948, and was ruled by a civilian government until 1962 (but with a military caretaker government in 1958–60). In a situation with communist parties and armed forces in Burma, Malaya, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia, and also the Korean War broke out in 1950, and in order to prevent the expansion of Communism in that region, the United States was quick to recognize Burma's independence and gave the country some economic assistance. However, the Burmese government refused to accept aid from the United States in March 1953, because of U.S. support of some of the Chinese Kuomintang forces retreating to the Shan State in 1949–50 to fight with the People's Republic of China and the Burmese government.¹⁴

In 1962, General Ne Win led a military coup and was in power until 1988. During this period, Burma followed a "neutral" foreign policy between the East and West "Blocs." Ne Win's foreign policy made that Burma become isolated, and almost all foreign investment was cut off. Nevertheless, Ne Win did not make Burma completely isolated from the world, and it still got assistance from the United States. For example, from 1950 to 1962, 972 Burma officers were trained by the U.S., and from 1980 to 1988, 255 Burma officers graduated from the U.S. The United States gave some economic assistance to Burma and provided helicopters and pilot training to help to eliminate the narcotics.¹⁵ Generally speaking, from 1948 to 1988, their bilateral relations were not extensive because, on the one hand, Burma feared that the big powers would interfere in its domestic affairs, so it mainly stuck to its "neutral foreign policy," and Ne Win cut off many external economic and diplomatic links; on the other, the United States saw its main task to defeat the former Soviet Union and Communism, and it once engaged in the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1973, which caused shortages in diplomatic resources and therefore reduced interaction with Burma.

¹⁴ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116.

The Burmese-U.S. bilateral relations deteriorated and reached the lowest point after another military coup on September 18, 1988. The coup followed countrywide demonstrations, which made Ne Win resign, but the following interim government was unable to control the situation. The military forces cracked down on protestors, which caused a lot of casualties. In order to regain power the military made a coup, and the Tatmadaw government was established. It was first called the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) but was renamed the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in 1997. When the SLORC held general elections in 1990, the NLD won. The SLORC refused to relinquish power and has remained in power ever since. The SLORC/SPDC retaliated against the opponents by sentencing NDL's leader Aung San Suu Kyi to house arrest, and destroying the local branches of the NLD.

Thus, the bilateral relations between Burma and the United States worsened from 1988–2008, with the two countries' ambassadors leaving each other's country; ambassadors have not yet been dispatched. The U.S. has condemned the Myanmar government on many occasions because it claims that the SPDC violated human rights and repressed the democratic opposition.¹⁶ On January 18, 2005, Condoleezza Rice, President George W. Bush's nominee as secretary of state, identified Myanmar as one of the many "outposts of tyranny."¹⁷ In 2007, President Bush called Myanmar "a continuing, unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the U.S."¹⁸ Different U.S. authorities imposed broad sanctions on Burma under the banner of "democracy and freedom," and sanctions became gradually more severe. In 1997, the United States restricted visas for the high-level Burmese military officers and their families, and it prohibited U.S. companies from investing in Myanmar.¹⁹ The Bush administration signed the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act (BFDA) in 2003. The U.S. Congress has renewed the Act annually. In July 2008, the Congress enacted the Tom Lantos Block Burmese JADE (Junta's Anti-Democratic Efforts) Act of

¹⁶ "Bush announces more Burma sanctions," *USA Today*, October 19, 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-10-19-burma-sanctions_N.htm (accessed on April 22, 2010).

¹⁷ "Rice names 'outposts of tyranny'," BBC News, January 19, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/4186241.stm> (accessed on April 22, 2010).

¹⁸ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 119.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115.

2008 to expand the sanctions. These sanctions banned imports of products of Myanmar, froze assets of the SPDC, and put restrictions on other individuals from Myanmar and entities responsible for human rights abuses and public corruption.²⁰ The United States also asked other countries and international institutions, such as UN and the World Bank, to impose sanctions on Myanmar. In January 2007, the U.S. and the UK sponsored a UN Security Council resolution to impose sanctions on Myanmar, but it was vetoed by China and Russia. The military forces in Myanmar wanted to control the power, and firmly resisted U.S. sanctions. The SPDC feared that the United States would pursue “regime change,” which was one of the reasons why the SPDC moved the capital from the coastal city of Yangon to the inland city of Naypyitaw. Actually, the sanctions and the deteriorated relations caused problems for both sides. The United States has not reached the goals of “regime change” and establishing “American style democracy” in Myanmar, and Myanmar has also suffered a lot because of the economic sanctions. Their relations failed to improve during this period.

²⁰ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, “Background Note: Burma,” U.S. Department of State, January 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm> (accessed on March 29, 2010).

Improvement in Bilateral Relations since the End of 2008

The process to improve relations between Myanmar and the United States has evolved in four stages. The first stage lasted from the end of 2008 to April 2009. The two countries tried to communicate with each other. The election of Barack Obama as U.S. president provided an opportunity to improve relations between the two countries. The Chairman of the SPDC General Than Shwe grasped this opportunity and sent a congratulatory message to Obama on the occasion of his election, and the official newspaper the *New Light of Myanmar* reported this on its front page on November 8, 2008. This is a strong signal of good will from Myanmar, since only the day before, on November 7, 2008, the U.S. State Department condemned the SPDC for taking legal action against several lawyers defending student activists.²¹ Also the Obama administration realized that the U.S. faced many problems domestically and diplomatically, especially due to the financial crisis. This meant that the U.S. became a declining hegemonic country, so it had to pursue a more pragmatic foreign policy and use “smart power.” In his inaugural presidential address, Obama stated that the U.S. could develop relations with non-democratic countries, if they made progress.²² Since then the Obama administration gradually began the process of its adjustment of policy towards Myanmar. On February 18, 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton stated in Jakarta that economic sanctions imposed by the U.S. and other Western governments had failed to pressure the Myanmar government, and she told that the Obama administration was going to begin a comprehensive review of U.S. Myanmar policy.²³ In order to show its progress in the human rights field and further express goodwill,

²¹ “Junta congratulates Obama,” *The Straits Times*, November 8, 2008, http://www.straitstimes.com/Breaking%2BNews/SE%2BAsia/Story/STIStory_299892.html (accessed on April 7, 2010).

²² “Full Transcript: President Barack Obama’s Inaugural Address,” ABC News, January 20, 2009, <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=6689022> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

²³ Glenn Kessler, “Shift Possible on Burma Policy-Sanctions Have Failed, Clinton Says, Hinting at Other Tacks,” *Washington Post*, February 19, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/02/18/AR2009021800273.html> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

the Myanmar government began to release more than 6300 prisoners on February 21, 2009.²⁴ On March 25, Director of the Office for Mainland South-east Asia Stephen Blake met with Myanmar's Foreign Minister Nyan Win in Naypyitaw. The Myanmar government gave a high-level reception to Blake, and the *New Light of Myanmar* trumpeted the meeting in an unusually glowing account. It reported that Blake and Foreign Minister Nyan Win held "cordial discussions on issues of mutual interests and the promotion of bilateral relations between Myanmar and the U.S." Normally, if the state run media mentions the U.S., they focus on negative aspects.²⁵ At the same time, the Obama administration began to conduct a review of its policy toward Myanmar. Although the two countries seemed to begin to interact with each other, their diplomatic contacts ceased for about two months. Behind were two possible reasons: one was possibly due to that new government was formed and there was no assistant secretary of state handling East Asian affairs in the U.S. Department of State, and therefore no suitable official who could directly take charge of the Myanmar issue. This was because Hillary Clinton had to manage U.S. foreign affairs and did not have enough energy to handle the Myanmar issue, which was not at the top agenda. The second reason was that the two countries have had limited contact for twenty years. The reengagement process had just started, so they had to carefully evaluate the best way to improve improving relations.

The second stage ran from May 2009 to the beginning of August 2009, when bilateral relations were once again damaged by the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi. She is the daughter of General Aung San, who was the father of Burmese independence, and since 1988, she has been the general-secretary of the NLD, the biggest opposition party in Myanmar. In the 1990 general elections, the NLD won 392 seats of 479 seats.²⁶ Since 1989 Aung San Suu Kyi has been detained under house arrest for 14 years, even though she is considered by many to be a symbol of democracy in Myanmar. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. The military did not recognize

²⁴ Zhang Yunfei, "Myanmar Begins to Give Amnesty to More than 6300 Prisoners," Xinhua News, February 21, 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-02/21/content_10861622.htm (accessed on April 8, 2010).

²⁵ Glenn Kessler, "U.S. Diplomat, Burmese Official Meet White House Is Reviewing Policy Toward Nation," *Washington Post*, March 26, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/25/AR2009032503116.html> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

²⁶ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 91–92.

the election results, and has been in power ever since. The U.S. Department of State, in its semiannual reports to the Congress on Myanmar, called for the Myanmar authorities to honor the results of the 1990 elections and give power to NLD before the normalization of their bilateral relations could occur.²⁷ On May 3, 2009, Aung San Suu Kyi allowed the American John Yettaw to stay in her house. On May 13, she was arrested because she violated the terms of her house arrest. On August 11, after a three months trial, Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to three years in prison, but Than Shwe reduced the sentence to one and a half years of house arrest. The reason for this reduction was to abate U.S. reactions. Yettaw was sentenced to seven years of hard labor because he violated immigration laws and other laws of Myanmar. However, the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi damaged the process of improving the bilateral relations. The Obama administration renewed the sanctions against Myanmar in May just after the Myanmar court began to try Aung San Suu Kyi's case.²⁸ On August 11, Obama said that the sentencing of Aung San Suu Kyi was "unjust" and violated her human rights. He also called for release of her as well as other political prisoners in Myanmar.²⁹ According to Secretary of State Clinton, Aung San Suu Kyi "should not have been tried and she should not have been convicted." Clinton also said that the Myanmar elections, scheduled for 2010, would have absolutely no legitimacy unless the SPDC chose to "immediately end its repression of so many in this country, and start a dialogue with the opposition and the ethnic groups."³⁰ During the time of trial and sentence of Aung San Suu Kyi, U.S.-Myanmar relations worsened, and led to the suspension of relations.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 92.

²⁸ "Overview of Burma sanctions," BBC News, December 18, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8195956.stm> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

²⁹ The U.S. and other western countries consider there are about 2000 "political prisoners" including Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar, but the SPDC states that there is no "political prisoners" in Myanmar. See "Myanmar Frees Thousands, Including Political Prisoner," *The New York Times*, September 23, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/24/world/asia/24myanmar.html> (accessed on April 25, 2010); U Myo Myint, "Strengthening Nation's Workforce through Amnesty," *The New Light of Myanmar*, September 20, 2009; Kyaw Ye Min, "Amnestied Prisoners to Serve as Responsible Citizens," *The New Light of Myanmar*, September 23, 2009; Tin Min Kyaw, "An Idea to Help Achieve National Reconsolidation," *The New Light of Myanmar*, September 24, 2009.

³⁰ Stephen Kaufman, "Obama, Clinton Condemn Sentencing of Burma's Aung San Suu Kyi," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, August 11, 2009, <http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2009/August/20090811160723esnamfuak0.5395777.html> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

The third stage was from mid August 2009 to the end of the year, when the two countries overcame the bad influence of the Aung San Suu Kyi trial, and high-level meetings increased in number. Although the United States continued to criticize the government of Myanmar and extended the sanctions, and also the SPDC continued to condemn the U.S. and accusing it to wish to sow hatred among the people,³¹ they considered their own strategic interests and looked ahead to the future. They did not end the engagement process but, on the contrary, initiated higher-level meetings with the level of dialogue becoming higher and higher. From August 14 to 16, U.S. Senator Jim Webb, who serves as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs, visited Myanmar, met with the Chairman of SPDC Than Shwe, Aung San Suu Kyi, and succeeded in having the imprisoned U.S. citizen Yettaw released. Webb became the first high-level U.S. politician in more than ten years to meet with Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi during one trip. The high level reception for Webb was unprecedented in Myanmar's history, which showed that Than Shwe wanted to improve relations with the United States, because UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had visited Myanmar in July 2009, but had not been allowed to meet Aung San Suu Kyi. The Myanmar official newspapers also praised Jim Webb's opposition of sanctions toward Myanmar.³² Some western media thought that Webb's visit was important, not only because he broke the deadlock caused by the sentence of Aung San Suu Kyi, but also because it was a signal to the new Obama administration, since Webb advocates a change of U.S. policy toward Myanmar. He is also considered a close ally of Obama.³³

The U.S. reaction to the Kokang incident that occurred in Myanmar seemed to show some change in the U.S. policy toward Myanmar. In August 2009, the local army of Kokang Special Region 1 in Myanmar's Shan State and the Myanmar Tatmadaw forces clashed with each other, and many fled to China. But the U.S. government did not criticize the Myanmar government,

³¹ See *The New Light of Myanmar* everyday.

³² "Myanmar Newspapers called on the Western Countries to Give Up Sanctions," *Lian He Zao Bao*, August 21, 2009, http://www.zaobao.com/yx/yx090821_006.shtml (accessed on August 21, 2009).

³³ Justin McCurry, "Senator Jim Webb's Burma visit raises speculation of new US policy," *Guardian*, August 14, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/aug/14/us-senator-jim-webb-burma> (accessed on April 9, 2010).

as it usual does. Instead the U.S. Department of State issued a short statement expressing its concern: "The U.S. is deeply concerned over the attacks by the Burma Army in eastern Burma against several ethnic nationality groups, and we continue to monitor developments carefully. The brutal fighting has forced thousands of civilians to flee their homes for safety in Thailand and China, and reduced both stability and the prospects for national reconciliation. We urge the Burmese authorities to cease their military campaign and to develop a genuine dialogue with the ethnic minority groups, as well as with Burma's democratic opposition."³⁴

During September and October 2009, bilateral high level official meetings became more frequent, and the United States announced a new policy towards Myanmar. In order to show the United States that Myanmar was endeavoring to improve the human rights conditions and promote the national reconciliation process, the SPDC released 7114 prisoners on September 17, which included 119 political prisoners out of an estimated 2000.³⁵ In the following days, Myanmar's official newspaper the *New Light of Myanmar*, engaged relatively actively in propaganda and published several editorials stating that since the Tatmadaw government came to power, it has held 15 amnesties, and released 1.149.000 prisoners.³⁶ The United States lifted the visa ban toward senior Myanmar officials.³⁷ One of the reasons for

³⁴ Ian Kelly, "Urging an End to the Violence in Eastern Burma," U.S. Department of State, August 31, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2009/aug/128504.htm> (accessed on April 9, 2010).

³⁵ John Pomfret, "Visit by Burmese Official Hints at U.S. Policy Shift," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/22/AR20090922202911.html> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

³⁶ U Myo Myint, "Strengthening Nation's Workforce through Amnesty," *The New Light of Myanmar*, September 20, 2009; Kyaw Ye Min, "Amnestied Prisoners to Serve as Responsible Citizens," *The New Light of Myanmar*, September 23, 2009; Tin Min Kyaw, "An Idea to Help Achieve National Reconsolidation," *The New Light of Myanmar*, September 24, 2009.

³⁷ The U.S. restricted the senior officials of the Myanmar SPDC to come into U.S. For example, Sec.6.(a) of the "Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003" imposed by the Bush administration states that "the President is authorized to deny visas and entry to the former and present leadership of the SPDC." On October 1, 2007, President Bush announced that because of ongoing repression he was adding more than three dozen military officials, political leaders of the Union Solidarity Development Association and their families to the visa-ban list. See "Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act of 2003," Library of Congress, July 28, 2003, <http://www.congress.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d1108:SN01182:@@L&summ2=m&> (accessed on April 9, 2010); Michael Goldfarb, "Sen. Webb Hands Junta Another Diplomatic Coup; Scores US Visa for

this was Senators Webb's persuasive nature.³⁸ On September 18, 2009, the Obama administration allowed Nyan Win to arrive in Washington for the first time in nine years and left the next day after he had met Webb. Nyan Win was also allowed to visit the White House, but he did not meet with officials. The Obama administration approved the repair of the Myanmar embassy in Washington, which was considered a goodwill gesture, because Myanmar had previously never been granted permission before. The trip appeared to be part of a new policy of the Obama administration, which encouraged U.S. officials to engage with high level Myanmar officials.³⁹ On September 26, 2009, the Obama administration allowed Myanmar's Prime Minister Thein Sein to attend the UN General Assembly in New York. He was the highest ranking Myanmar official to address the General Assembly since 1995.⁴⁰

Almost at the same time, on September 28, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell announced the results of the review of the U.S. Myanmar policy. The main point of his announcement was that "the U.S. recognized that the conditions in Burma were deplorable and that neither isolation nor engagement, when implemented alone, had succeeded in improving those conditions. Since the Burma leadership has shown an interest in engaging with the U.S., the Obama administration would pursue a policy of engagement as well as sanctions to help bring about democratic change in Burma. The U.S. strategic goals and interests of this approach were still to support a unified, peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Burma that respects the human rights of its citizens. To that end, the U.S. will continue to push for the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and all political prisoners, an end to conflicts

Senior General," *Weekly Standard*, September 22, 2009, http://www.weeklystandard.com/weblogs/TWSFP/2009/09/webb_hands_junta_another_diplo.asp (accessed on April 10, 2010).

³⁸ Michael Goldfarb, "Sen. Webb Hands Junta Another Diplomatic Coup: Scores US Visa for Senior General," *Weekly Standard*, September 22, 2009, http://www.weeklystandard.com/weblogs/TWSFP/2009/09/webb_hands_junta_another_diplo.asp (accessed on April 10, 2010).

³⁹ John Pomfret, "Visit by Burmese Official Hints at U.S. Policy Shift," *Washington Post*, September 23, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/22/AR20090922202911.html> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

⁴⁰ Louis Charbonneau, "Myanmar PM meets U.S. senator, promises reforms," Reuters, September 28, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE58R5FQ20090928> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

with ethnic minorities and gross human rights violations, and initiation of a credible internal political dialogue with the democratic opposition and ethnic minority leaders on elements of reconciliation and reform. The U.S. would also press Burma to comply with its international obligations, including on nonproliferation, ending any prohibited military or proliferation-related cooperation with North Korea. If Burma made meaningful progress towards these goals, it would be possible to improve the relationship with the U.S. in a step-by-step process. This would likely be a long and difficult process, and the U.S. was prepared to sustain their efforts on this front."⁴¹

Two days later, in his testimony before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Campbell stated there that were a number of areas in which the two countries might be able to improve cooperation to their mutual benefit, such as counter-narcotics, health, environmental protection, and the recovery of World War II-era Missing-in-Action remains.⁴² On September 29, officials from the two countries began the first senior level dialogue in more than ten years. Campbell led a delegation that met with Myanmar Minister for Science and Technology U Thaung, and Myanmar Permanent Representative to the UN Than Swe, and discussed issues and ways to improve bilateral relations. The Myanmar government actively responded to the U.S. adjustment of its policy toward Myanmar and eased the control of Aung San Suu Kyi, because it knew this was the greatest U.S. concern.

In October and December 2009, U Aung Kyi, Minister for Labor and the Minister for relations to detained Aung San Suu Kyi met her three times, and talked about the issues concerning the lifting of sanctions. The SPDC also allowed her to meet with the diplomats from the United States, Australia, and EU countries, and they talked mainly about sanctions.

In November 2009, the bilateral meetings reached a climax; the largest improvement since 1988 was seen. From November 3 to 4, Campbell and deputy Scot Marciel led the first high level U.S. diplomatic delegation to

⁴¹ Kurt M. Campbell, "U.S. Policy toward Burma," U.S. Department of State, September 28, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/09/129698.htm> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

⁴² Kurt M. Campbell, "Testimony of Kurt Campbell before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs Senate Foreign Relations Committee," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 30, 2009, <http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2009/CampbellTestimony090930p.pdf> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

Myanmar in order to begin a fact finding visit since 1995, when Madeleine Albright went to Myanmar as President Clinton's ambassador to the UN.⁴³ It was an exploratory mission. The main purpose of the visit was "really not only to explain to the key parties (or the stakeholders) in the Myanmar government, political parties, opposition, ethnic minority groups, et cetera, to kind of explain the context of the U.S. concluded policy review, but also to hear from them."⁴⁴ Campbell's delegation got a courteous reception. It met with Thein Sein⁴⁵ and other senior Myanmar officials as well as Aung San Suu Kyi and some leaders of the NLD, a few ethnic leaders, and some other party leaders. This meant that the Myanmar government let the U.S. delegation engage with representatives from all political forces in Myanmar. Most importantly, Campbell met with Aung San Suu Kyi for a two hour meeting. There was no Myanmar officials present during their meeting. On November 4, the national television of Myanmar broadcasted the news of the talks between Campbell and Thein Sein, and the video in which Campbell and Aung San Suu Kyi shook hands, which was a very friendly signal from Myanmar authorities, because official media in Myanmar seldom carry reports that show the United States in a positive light.⁴⁶ At the same time, some U.S. media such as CNN, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *International Herald Tribune* echoed Obama administration's policy adjustment towards Myanmar positively, which they once referred to as "Myanmar" instead of "Burma," when they reported the Campbell visit.⁴⁷ On November 15, Obama shook hands with Thein Sein at the meeting with the ten leaders of ASEAN, the first ever encounter with a U.S. president, and Obama reiterated his offer of improving ties with Washington if the military government

⁴³ "US diplomats seek facts in Burma," BBC News, November 3, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8339333.stm> (accessed on April 1, 2010).

⁴⁴ Scot Marciel, "Burma: Policy Review," U.S. Department of State, November 5, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/11/131536.htm> (accessed on March 20, 2010).

⁴⁵ According to his schedule, the Chairman of SPDC Than Shwe was inspecting reconstruction work in the Irrawaddy Delta where was heavily destroyed by the Severe Cyclonic Storm Nargis in 2008. So Campbell did not meet with Than Shwe.

⁴⁶ Ling Shuo, "The First Visit of the U.S. Senior Officials to Myanmar Released New Signal," Xinhua News, November 6, 2009, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2009-11/06/content_12395931.htm (accessed on March 20, 2010).

⁴⁷ "U.S. diplomats meet with pro-democracy leader Suu Kyi," CNN News, November 4, 2009, <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/11/04/myanmar.us.embassy.visit/> (accessed on March 21, 2010)® "US Envoy Asks Myanmar to Open Up to Opposition," *International Herald Tribune*, November 4, 2009 (accessed on March 21, 2010)® "U.S. Takes Democracy Plea to Myanmar's Rulers," *The Wall Street Journal*, November 6-8, 2009.

pursued democratic reform and freed political prisoners, including opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi.⁴⁸ This meeting showed that both countries took concrete step to promote bilateral relations. The trend of the relations between the two countries seemed to move in a positive direction in the last two months. The results of the process of improving bilateral relations seemed to be obvious, just because when the two countries initiated the process their relations had been ice-cold for twenty years.

The fourth stage is the period since January 2010, when the bilateral relations were harmed again, because the election laws enacted by the SPDC completely eliminated Aung San Suu Kyi from Myanmar politics, which meant that the NLD rejected the general election, and the United States declared the Myanmar government did not take steps to promote national reconciliation. On March 8, 2010, the SPDC published the new election laws prohibiting parties with members currently in detention, so if the biggest opposition party, the NLD, wanted to register, it had to force the detained Aung San Suu Kyi out of the party. On March 29, the NLD decided against registering for the general election and decided to boycott the election. According to the election law, the NLD has become an illegal entity as of the May 7 deadline for party registration. The United States respected the NLD's decision, and stated that the Myanmar government did not take necessary steps to open up the political process and engage in serious dialogue with the opposition parties and various ethnic groups. However, the two countries do not fully object to the possibility of engagement. On March 18, Myanmar released the naturalized U.S. citizen Nyi Nyi Aung, who had been sentenced to five years of hard labor for forging his identity, possessing undeclared foreign currency and failing to renounce his Myanmar citizenship. The Myanmar state run media claimed that he was released in order to continue the "friendship" that exists between Myanmar and the United States.⁴⁹ Campbell visited Myanmar again in May 2010, but he said the election laws were disappointing and they were a "setback" for political dia-

⁴⁸ Patricia Zengerle and Bill Tarrant, "Obama meets Myanmar PM, calls for Suu Kyi's release," Reuters, November 15, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE5AE0EG20091115> (accessed on March 23, 2010).

⁴⁹ Larry Jagan, "US to renew bid for thaw in relations," Mizzima News, April 5, 2010, <http://www.mizzima.com/news/world/3784-us-again-tries-to-break-the-ice-with-the-junta.html> (accessed on March 25, 2010).

logue and the SPDC's engagement with Washington.⁵⁰ On May 14, 2010, the White House decided to extend the sanctions imposed on Myanmar by one year, because it considered that the actions and policies of the Government of Myanmar continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the U.S.⁵¹ Jim Webb, chairman of the U.S. Senate foreign relations subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific affairs, cancelled his planned June 3 visit to Myanmar because some news said the country possibly developed nuclear weapons in tandem with North Korea.⁵² The improvement in relations between the two countries will be a long process, because there are many challenges for their relations.

⁵⁰ "Burma election laws a 'setback'," BBC News, March 12, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8563870.stmon> (accessed on June 7, 2010). Also on March 8, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon said that he had written to Than Shwe, expressing impatience about the lack of progress toward the elections. See Richard Lloyd Parry, "Burma publishes new election laws", Times Online, March 9, 2010, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article7054903.ece> (accessed on June 7, 2010).

⁵¹ "U.S. extends sanctions on Myanmar," Xinhua News, May 15, 2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-05/15/c_13295623.htm (accessed on June 5, 2010).

⁵² Stephen Kurczy, "Jim Webb cancels Burma visit after report claims junta 'planning nuclear bomb'," The Christian Science Monitor, June 4, 2010, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/terrorism-security/2010/0604/Jim-Webb-cancels-Burma-visit-after-report-claims-junta-planning-nuclear-bomb> (accessed on June 18, 2010). Actually, the U.S. does not have hard evidence about the possible nuclear cooperation between Myanmar and North Korea, it just suspects that Myanmar wants to develop nuclear weapons.

Reasons for Improvement in Bilateral Relations

There are a number of key reasons for the U.S. change of its Myanmar policy from only sanctions to sanctions and direct engagement. Firstly, the United States realized that the long term policies of sanctions, isolation and high pressure were almost useless, and had not transformed Myanmar into a democratic country. On the contrary, these policies hurt mainly the general populace and not the senior officials in Myanmar. The main reason for that the sanctions are not effective is because Myanmar is able to resist outside pressure. Economically, Myanmar has a self contained economy. Its economic development level is very low; the agriculture output value accounts for 40.2 percent of GDP and the peasants are 18.9 million accounting for 70 percent of the number of total employment. Its main agricultural products export a lot. For example, its export of rice in the years 2007 to 2008 is 400,000 tons.⁵³ So, the Myanmar economy is largely self supplying, and ordinary people can basically survive even when the country has few contacts with the outside world. Some Myanmar citizens say that as long as they have the rice and salt, they can survive. Politically, the SPDC takes various kinds of measures to consolidate its rule; domestically, it has eased the tense relations with many ethnic minorities, and has accomplished cease fire agreements with 25 different ethnic armed groups by 2006,⁵⁴ which has maintained a relatively peaceful environment in the whole country, and contributes to its economic development.⁵⁵ At the same time, the SPDC has enlarged its armed forces from 170,000 at the end of 1980s to 500,000 currently, and it continues to improve the salary of the soldiers and civil servants to strengthen its base of government. On the other hand, the SPDC has severely hit the NLD by closing its branches in the whole country and by restricting its political

⁵³ "The Overview of Myanmar," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 27, 2009, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_23/ (accessed on March 26, 2010).

⁵⁴ Martin Smith, *State of Strife: The Dynamics of Ethnic Conflict in Burma* (Washington, D.C.: East-West Center, 2007), p. 2.

⁵⁵ One big ethnic arm force called Karen National Liberation Army still continues to fight in the Myanmar-Thailand border area, but this group has met several heavy strikes from the government. Another incident was the Kokang clashes occurred in August, 2009, which made situation in the Eastern and Northern part of Myanmar was tense.

activities. The SPDC, at last, uses the new election laws to end Aung San Suu Kyi's life in politics, because the laws prohibit her from attending the general election in 2010, which caused the NLD to reject the election. Then, according to the election laws, the NLD has become illegal because it did not register before May 7. Now, the SPDC and its political force "the Union Solidarity and Development Association" dominate Myanmar politics, and the other parties can not overthrow the SPDC. Externally, the SPDC makes use of Myanmar's abundant resources, such as natural gas, jade, teak, in order to develop economic and political relations with ASEAN countries, Japan, India, China, Russia, and other countries, and absorbs foreign capital.⁵⁶ This has helped the Myanmar government break the U.S. sanctions during more than two decades. That is to say that the sanctions exerted by the United States and other western countries are not effective. One important reason for this is that the sanctions are not supported by most Asian countries.

Secondly, Obama wanted to change the situation so that the U.S. interests and influence in Myanmar continued to be weakened. The U.S. sanctions against Myanmar are a double-edged sword, hurting Myanmar as well as the United States. Since the 1990s, encouraged by the U.S. government, Franklin Research & Development Corporation and other American associations linked with the exiled Myanmar politicians in the U.S. to build "the alliance of withdrawing from Myanmar," agitated U.S. companies in Myanmar to such an extent that they left the country. Later, Pepsi, Apple, and Coca Cola, and most large scale U.S. companies also left.⁵⁷ Due to this fact, the U.S. companies lost the chance to take advantage of the abundant natural resources in Myanmar, and left the Myanmar market to companies from other countries. Furthermore, because the sanction laws and executive orders forbid U.S. companies from trading with Myanmar, their bilateral trade is almost nonexistent. So, facing the serious financial crisis, Myanmar's enriched natural resources and markets appeal to the U.S. companies in particular.

Thirdly, the improvement of relations with Myanmar would help the U.S. to strengthen its relations with ASEAN. The Obama administration

⁵⁶ Until May 31, 2009, Myanmar got FDI totally US\$15.767 billion. See "The Overview of Myanmar," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 27, 2009, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/chn/pds/gjhdq/gj/yz/1206_23/ (accessed on March 26, 2010).

⁵⁷ He Shengda, Li Chenyang, *Myanmar* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2009), p. 426.

realized that the policy of ignoring ASEAN (a stand taken by the Bush administration) was wrong, and led to the increased influence of China, Japan, India and Russia in Southeast Asia. Therefore, the Obama administration began to reinforce its strategic existence in Southeast Asia. For example, it signed the U.S. Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia on July 22, 2009.⁵⁸ The Myanmar issue was an obstacle for deeper relations between the United States and ASEAN, however, because ASEAN pursues a policy of constructive engagement towards Myanmar. When the U.S. once asked ASEAN to isolate and even expel Myanmar, this led to problems in the U.S.-ASEAN relations. If the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Myanmar are as bad as before, they will prevent the U.S. from developing further cooperation with the ASEAN countries, because Myanmar is a member of ASEAN. So the improvement of relations with Myanmar serves also the U.S. strategy towards ASEAN.

Fourthly, the United States wants to counter China's increasing influence in Myanmar and even in Southeast Asia. Myanmar has a geographically strategic location and is an important regional country, because it has abundant natural resources and is sandwiched between the United States, China and India. Furthermore, it connects to the western approaches of the Malacca Straits, which is the strategic western supply route between the military bases of the U.S. in the Pacific and its Middle Eastern bases.⁵⁹ Therefore, the U.S. does not want any regional power to control Myanmar. However, because Myanmar has gone through a long period of sanctions and pressure from the U.S. and the EU, the country has focused on its cooperation with China, and during the past two decades, China's influence in Myanmar and even the region has grown rapidly. China has become the third biggest investor in Myanmar.⁶⁰ Furthermore, China is constructing large scale gas and oil pipelines from the west coast of Myanmar to China. China's growing influence in Myanmar is obviously not a good signal from

⁵⁸ Office of the Spokesman, "U.S. Accession to Treaty of Amity, Cooperation in Southeast Asia," U.S. Department of State, July 22, 2009, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/July/20090722100601xjsnommis0.9985468.html> (accessed on March 27, 2010).

⁵⁹ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁰ "China has become the third biggest investor in Myanmar," Economic and Commercial Counselor's Office of the People's Republic of China in Myanmar, April 15, 2010, <http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/aarticle/i/jyjl/j/201004/20100406869752.html> (accessed on April 23, 2010).

a U.S. perspective. In order to restrain China's strong influence in Myanmar and the region, and to protect its regional and global interests, the U.S. has to develop better relations with Myanmar and build up a strong presence in the country.

Fifthly, the United States wants to prevent North Korea and Myanmar from developing close military cooperation, which is very important for stopping the possible proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and even nuclear weapons from North Korea to Southeast Asia.⁶¹ On July 21, 2009, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton expressed concern over military links between Myanmar and North Korea, after information emerged that Myanmar may be trying to acquire nuclear technology from Pyongyang. Furthermore, recent reports from Myanmar exile media said that the two countries had concluded a military pact in late 2008, including the construction of underground installations in Myanmar.⁶² Although the U.S. has no hard evidence regarding these reports, it presses Myanmar to comply with its international obligations, regarding non-proliferation, the ending of any prohibited military or proliferation related cooperation with North Korea, and full compliance with UN Resolutions 1874 and 1718. The U.S. is concerned about the North Korean nuclear issue and the possible proliferation of WMD from North Korea to Myanmar and Southeast Asia. Finding a direct and effective way to cut off Myanmar's military ties with North Korea is considered to be an important and necessary step to prevent the country from possible engaging in proliferation of WMD in the Southeast Asia. If the U.S. still sticks to a hostile policy towards Myanmar, it will simply force Myanmar and North Korea to develop closer military relations in order to oppose the U.S. The U.S. has to improve its relations with Myanmar in order to provide a channel for persuading Myanmar to give up military cooperation with North Korea.

There are a number of key reasons why the Myanmar government wants better relations with the U.S. Firstly, the military government hopes that the U.S. will lift the strict and broad sanctions and heavy political pressure, which have been detrimental to Myanmar. Although the SPDC has survived

⁶¹ The U.S. does not have hard evidence about the possible proliferation of WMD from North Korea to Southeast Asia, it just suspects.

⁶² Julian Borger, "Burma suspected of forming nuclear link with North Korea," *Guardian*, July 21, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jul/21/burma-north-korea-nuclear-clinton> (accessed on April 12, 2010).

for more than twenty years under the U.S. sanctions, it is an indisputable fact that the sanctions have added to the lagging economy. For example, because President Bush imposed new sanctions against Myanmar after the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act had been adopted in 2003, including a ban on imports of products of Myanmar, and a ban on the export of financial services to Myanmar,⁶³ the export value of Myanmar in 2003 declined sharply to US\$2.355 billion, while the exports value in 2002 was US\$3 billion. And just from January to May 2003, Myanmar's export of garment value lost US\$220 million, which was a critical blow to the textile industry.⁶⁴ Furthermore, because the other western countries followed the U.S. sanctions against Myanmar, it means that Myanmar was almost economically isolated by the countries whose total GDP accounts for more than half of the total world GDP. If Myanmar can improve its relations with the U.S. and make it lift its sanctions, then maybe other western countries will follow the U.S. This would make it possible for Myanmar to target a large international market and even attract FDI from western countries, which would ease its economic difficulties and promote its economic development.

Secondly, the Myanmar government hopes that the United States will recognize the result of the general election in 2010. The SPDC is going to hold a multiparty election, which will be the first one since the 1990 general election. Than Shwe has vowed to create a so-called "disciplined democracy" that will not only entrench military rule but also legalize it through the election, because a civilian government will be established after the election.⁶⁵ The SPDC considers this election to be one of the democratic milestones in Myanmar's history, so it has long prepared for the election. For example, it took 15 years to work out the new constitution (from 1993–2008), then it held the constitutional referendum in May 2008. The provisions of the constitution ensure military control at all levels. According to the constitution, military personnel on active duty (nominated by the minister of defense) will have a quarter of the seats, both at the national level and the

⁶³ Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "Background Note: Burma," U.S. Department of State, January, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35910.htm> (accessed on March 29, 2010).

⁶⁴ He Shengda, Li Chenyang, *Myanmar*, pp.430.

⁶⁵ Andrew Marshall, "Getting to Know Burma's Ruling General," *Time*, October 19, 2009, <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1929130,00.html> (accessed on March 30, 2010).

state/regional level, and the president must have military knowledge.⁶⁶ On one hand, the military plans to hold power after the election to protect its interests. On the other hand, it wants this election and the new civilian government to be recognized both domestically and internationally. Externally, the attitude of the U.S. toward the election is one of the most important signals in the international community, and can influence the attitude of other western countries and even many other Asian countries. If the relations between Myanmar and the United States are still tense, or deteriorate for some reason, it is impossible for the U.S. to recognize the election, and then other western countries will follow U.S. In this case, one of the external goals of the election will not be realized. Now the Myanmar government is trying to improve relations with the U.S., and it has received some positive feedback from the U.S., which has also influenced the EU policy towards Myanmar. Following the thawing of relations between Myanmar and the U.S., the EU ambassador for the Southeast Asia region, David Lipman, held talks with Than Shwe on December 3, 2009, and said the EU would begin “sustained political dialogue” with Myanmar.⁶⁷ On April 26, 2010, the EU declared that it “stands ready to respond positively to genuine progress in Myanmar” and hoped to maintain its dialogue with Naypidaw. The EU will make an attempt to send a diplomatic mission for discussions with the Myanmar authorities later this year.⁶⁸ These signals point to that there are prospects for better relations between Myanmar and western countries. At least there has been a beginning, which will help Myanmar to take more active and concrete measures to develop relations with the U.S.

Thirdly, the Myanmar government tries to develop good relations with more countries to get more interests. The Myanmar government does not want to depend too much on one country, and wants to make full use of its strategic importance and rich natural resources to develop its economic and military relations with as many countries as possible.⁶⁹ The more countries competing for interests in Myanmar, the more benefits the military

⁶⁶ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 144–45.

⁶⁷ “Burma’s Suu Kyi appeal, EU negotiations to open,” *Bangkok Post*, December 4, 2009, <http://www.bangkokpost.com/news/local/161936/> (accessed on April 13, 2010).

⁶⁸ Simon Roughheen, “After Renewing Sanctions, EU Seeks Meeting with Junta,” *Irrawaddy News*, April 27, 2010, http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=18327 (accessed on April 28, 2010).

⁶⁹ David I. Steinberg, “The United States and Its Allies: The Problems of Burma/Myanmar Policy,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2007), p. 221.

government will reap. So, establishing friendly relations with the United States and even attracting it to devote more resources to Myanmar will make more countries, including other western and Asian countries, countries compete to input more resources in Myanmar to reap the benefits.

Potential Problems in the Development of U.S.- Myanmar Relations

The relations between the United States and Myanmar have made some progress since the end of 2008, after their former relations having been tense, with almost no direct communication between the two countries. It is possible that bilateral relations can progress, by engaging in high-level meetings; by improving cooperation in non-sensitive areas such as anti-narcotics work, health, environmental protection, and the recovery of World War II-era Missing-in-Action; and by continuing talks about the sanctions.⁷⁰

The improvement process has been a difficult one, however. On April 21, 2010, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Philip J. Crowley told that the challenge of Myanmar was not created in one year; and it will not be solved in one year. Myanmar is an ongoing challenge. The U.S. will continue talks with Myanmar.⁷¹ But their relations have met trouble again because the U.S. extended sanctions against Myanmar in May 2010. The prospect of improvement in their bilateral relations is uncertain as it is very difficult for relations to show tangible development and improve on some important aspects in the near future. One such issue is a lifting all U.S. sanctions, and dispatching ambassadors, not to talk of normalizing their bilateral relations. It is even possible for their relations to sour.

Relations could turn worse for a number of reasons. Firstly, the two countries have different, even contradictory values and interests, so the issues such as the 2010 elections in Myanmar and Aung San Suu Kyi will be testing bilateral relations. In its semiannual reports to the Congress on Myanmar, the U.S. government has often called on the Myanmar government to recognize the results of the 1990 election which the NLD won which, in fact, has been to ask for the resignation of the military government.⁷² Now, U.S.

⁷⁰ Kurt M. Campbell, "Testimony of Kurt Campbell before the Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs Senate Foreign Relations Committee," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 30, 2009, <http://foreign.senate.gov/testimony/2009/CampbellTestimony090930p.pdf> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

⁷¹ Philip J. Crowley, "Daily Press Briefing," U.S. Department of State, April 21, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2010/4/140649.htm> (accessed on April 22, 2010).

⁷² Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 116.

strategic goals and interests are still to support a unified, peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Myanmar that respects the human rights of its citizens.⁷³ The dilemma residing in the bilateral relations of the two countries will not be eliminated easily. If U.S. goals will materialize in Myanmar, it means that the opposition force, such as the U.S. supported NLD, will come into power and overthrow the ruling status of the military, which will obviously not be allowed by the military forces. Actually, the adjustment of the U.S. policy on Myanmar is limited to realizing its goals, so there is almost no space of concession by the United States on the core values and goals such as “democracy and human rights.” While the aim of the adjustment of the policy of the Myanmar government is mainly to ease the heavy pressure from the U.S., it is impossible for the military forces to relinquish power in order to improve relations with the U.S. The military has played a dominating role in modern history of Myanmar, and even after the election, the military forces will still firmly hold power to protect their interests, and the relinquishing of political control by the military will take a long time.⁷⁴ Now, in order to make sure it can control power after the election, the SPDC enacted the 2008 constitution and issued the new election laws which make it easy for the military forces to continue to hold power. Furthermore, the SPDC sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi to another 18 months of house arrest after the Yettaw incident. The above measures enraged Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, and the latter decided to boycott the election. So the party registration process, the campaign activities, the process of voting and the result of the Myanmar election will make it difficult, even impossible for the United States to recognize the outcome as legitimate. On August 11, 2009, Hillary Clinton said that the Myanmar election scheduled for 2010 “will have absolutely no legitimacy” unless the SPDC chooses to “immediately end its repression of so many in this country, and start a dialogue with the opposition and the ethnic groups.”⁷⁵ Furthermore, on April 21, 2010, Philip Crowley of the State Department said that under these circumstances, the

⁷³ Kurt M. Campbell, “U.S. Policy Toward Burma,” U.S. Department of State, September 28, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/09/129698.htm> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

⁷⁴ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 162–64.

⁷⁵ Stephen Kaufman, “Obama, Clinton Condemn Sentencing of Burma’s Aung San Suu Kyi,” U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, August 11, 2009, <http://www.america.gov/st/democracyhr-english/2009/August/20090811160723esnamfuak0.5395777.html> (accessed on April 8, 2010).

U.S. would not recognize the result of the election.⁷⁶ So the new election will test and challenge their bilateral relations of the two countries.

Furthermore, it is very possible that the United States will express its dissatisfaction over the policy of the Myanmar government towards ethnic minorities. There are eight major ethnic groups and one hundred and thirty-five subgroups in Myanmar. Ethnic minorities make up about one third of the country's nearly 60 million inhabitants, and they occupy more than half of the country's territory. But the majority ethnic group Burmar has almost controlled the central government since independence, which has enraged the ethnic minorities, and many of them have organized their own armed forces to fight the central government to get more rights. A civil war lasted for about 40 years after independence.⁷⁷ The SPDC has eased the tense relations with many ethnic minorities, and accomplished cease fires with 25 different ethnic armed groups by 2006, which ended the large-scale civil war.⁷⁸ But contradictions still exist in the country; the central government wants to control the ethnic territories firmly in order to eliminate dangers of a secession of the country. The central government is afraid of the foreign intervention, because in the past ethnic rebellions were often supported or used by foreign states to promote secession activities. For example, Britain once supported Karen armies, and the United States supported the Kuomintang forces to resist the Myanmar central government.⁷⁹ Than Shwe worries more over the ethnic armed forces that are found within the country than over the opposition parties and the international pressure.⁸⁰ In August 2009, the local army of Kokang Special Region 1 in the Shan State and the Myanmar Tatmadaw forces clashed with each other, which caused many people to flee to neighboring China. The main ethnic armies, such as the United Wa State Army, the Kachin Independence Army, and the Mongla-based National Democratic Alliance Army refused to accept the Border Guard Force Plan

⁷⁶ Philip J. Crowley, "Daily Press Briefing," U.S. Department of State, April 21, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2010/4/140649.htm> (accessed on April 22, 2010).

⁷⁷ "Burma terrorising ethnic minorities," BBC News, July 17, 2002, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/2132986.stm> (accessed on April 28, 2010).

⁷⁸ Smith, *State of Strife*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 44.

⁸⁰ "Burma's Junta Intensifies Bid For Unification," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/09/24/AR2009092404824.html> (accessed on April 18, 2010).

proposed by SPDC, which made the relations of the two sides very tense. Maybe it will cause a war.

Although the United States continues to ask the military government to conduct a genuine dialogue with the ethnic minority groups about the democratic process, and to protect the interests of the minorities, the government may be suspicious of the U.S. intention. It is therefore impossible for the Myanmar government to accept requirements to deal with the ethnic minorities. If the U.S. sticks to its high standards and demands, it will face a disappointing development of the democratic process and the results of national reconciliation, because Myanmar has its own national conditions and democratic roadmap. Than Shwe wants to develop "discipline-flourishing democracy," and since Rome was not built in a day, the Obama administration will face slow progress of Myanmar's democratic development. Whether its current policy can last for a long time is a big question.

Secondly, the Obama administration faces many difficulties in adjusting its policy towards Myanmar domestically, which means that it is impossible to make great moves. The new U.S. policy towards Myanmar requires the support of significant bipartisan groups in Congress, but the Obama administration meets the pressure from the Congress as well as public opinion. If the Obama administration wants to make any substantive changes of its policy toward Myanmar, it has to be ratified by the House of the Representatives and the Senate, such as the lifting of all of the sanctions imposed on Myanmar, or reassigning an ambassador to Myanmar. There are strong opposing voices in the Congress. Many members of Congress condemn the SPDC and support Aung San Suu Kyi, who is a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. On April 3, 2009, seventeen member of Congress wrote Hillary Clinton, pointing out that the Congress had set several preconditions for a lifting of U.S. sanctions against Myanmar. These included the release of all political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi, a genuine tripartite dialogue between the SPDC, Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic minorities, and a cessation of attacks against civilians. These members of Congress also reminded Clinton that when Barack Obama was a Senator, he also supported the U.S. sanction policy towards Myanmar, which were manifested in the Burmese Freedom and Democracy Act and the Tom Lantos Block Burmese jade Act.⁸¹

⁸¹ Lalit K. Jha, "US Congressmen Cautious Over Lifting Sanctions," *Irrawaddy News*, April 4, 2009, http://www.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=1544 (accessed on April 19,

On October 21, 2009, at a Congressional hearing on Myanmar, several key congressional leaders of the opposition Republican Party including Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Dana Rohrabacher and Ed Royce expressed open opposition to the Obama administration's new engaging policy towards Myanmar.⁸² Furthermore, many celebrities such as former first lady Laura Bush, Former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Senator John McCain and Madonna, still publicly criticize the Myanmar government, call for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, and lobby the Congress to maintain or even strengthen the sanctions towards the Myanmar government.⁸³ After the Myanmar government published the new election laws on March 8, 2010, , nine U.S. Senators across the political spectrum, including 2008 presidential candidate John McCain, sent a letter to President Obama, calling for tighter sanctions on Myanmar's government, arguing that the new U.S. policy of engagement with Myanmar had not worked.⁸⁴

On the other hand, the Myanmar issue is not on the top agenda of Obama administration's foreign policy, because Myanmar is not a serious and direct threat like the North Korea nuclear issue, the Iranian nuclear issue, and the anti-terrorist war in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Myanmar is a "boutique issue," meaning that the Obama administration will not pay great political capital in order to make progress.⁸⁵ If the Obama administration does not get enough positive responses from the Myanmar side to justify a policy shift, it will face domestic pressure.⁸⁶ Assistant Secretary

2010).

⁸² Lalit K. Jha, "Key Republicans Oppose Engagement with Burma," *Irrawaddy News*, October 22, 2009, http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=17041 (accessed on April 20, 2010).

⁸³ See Laura Bush, "Do Not Forget Burma," *Washington Post*, June 28, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/26/AR2009062603459.html> (accessed on April 20, 2010); "Leading Voices—Bono, Clooney, Madonna, McCain, Tutu—Call for Release of Aung San Suu Kyi," *The Burma Campaign UK*, May 15, 2009, <http://www.burmacampaign.org.uk/index.php/news-and-reports/news-stories/leading-voicesbono-clooney-madonna-mccain-tutucall-for-release-of-burmese-1/2> (accessed on April 20, 2010).

⁸⁴ "U.S. Senators Seek Tighter Burma Sanctions," *Democratic Voice of Burma*, April 1, 2010, <http://www.dvb.no/elections/us-senators-seek-tighter-burma-sanctions/8454> (accessed on April 21, 2010).

⁸⁵ David I. Steinberg, "Out of the Cold: Burma and US Take Tentative Steps," *Yale Center for the Study of Globalization*, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/out-cold-burma-and-us-take-tentative-steps> (accessed on April 21, 2010).

⁸⁶ David I. Steinberg, "The U.S., China, and Burma/Myanmar: Reconsidering the Siege of an Outpost of Tyranny," in Li Chengyang and Wilhelm Hofmeister, eds., *Myanmar:*

of State Kurt Campbell claimed that Myanmar's newly-enacted elections laws are a "setback" for political dialogue and the SPDC's engagement with Washington on March 12, 2010, and told that the United States was disappointed because the new election laws prohibited many key opposition figures including detained leader Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in the election in 2010.⁸⁷

Thirdly, the two countries lack basic mutual trust, and the Myanmar government is suspicious about U.S. goals in Myanmar. So, any "unfriendly" activities may be exacerbated by each other, which will make it all the more difficult to reach results. The two countries were hostile to each other for twenty years from 1988 to 2008, and had almost no direct, positive communications with each other during that period. Furthermore, their political values and goals are opposite. So any negative and unfriendly words and actions may be misunderstood, which will damage their relations.

The basic features of U.S. policy towards Myanmar are "both engagement and sanctions." When the Myanmar court sentenced Aung San Suu Kyi to another 18 months of house arrest in August, 2009, the Obama administration extended the length of sanctions towards Myanmar. Furthermore, the U.S. embassy in Yangon is close to Aung San Suu Kyi's house, and U.S. diplomats meet very often with the NLD leaders, which is seen by Myanmar authorities to be interference in the internal affairs of Myanmar. Myanmar has even feared a U.S. military invasion for about two decades, when the U.S. had been calling for regime change in Myanmar.⁸⁸ This was one of the reasons why the Myanmar government moved the capital from the coastal city Yangon to the inland mountainous region Naypyidaw in November, 2005.⁸⁹ Recently, even while bilateral relations have become better than before, Than Shwe has declared that Myanmar should be alert the neocolonialist's intervention, which refers to the U.S.⁹⁰ Every day, the official

Prospect for Change (Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and Yunnan University Press, 2010), pp. 334–35.

⁸⁷ "Burma election laws a 'setback' for dialogue, says US," BBC News, March 12, 2010, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8563870.stm> (accessed on April 26, 2010).

⁸⁸ Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar*, pp. 118–19.

⁸⁹ Kate McGeown, "Burma's confusing capital move," BBC News, November 8, 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4416960.stm> (accessed on April 17, 2010).

⁹⁰ "Senior General Than Shwe Sends National Day Message," *The New Light of Myanmar*, November 11, 2009.

newspapers the *New Light of Myanmar* publishes articles about how VOA and BBC are sowing hatred among the people in Myanmar.

Now the general election is near, and Than Shwe's foremost task is to insure that the election can be conducted smoothly, so he will prevent possible interference from the United States because the U.S. still keeps close contacts with the opposition forces such NLD in Myanmar. He faces a dilemma: on one hand, his chief aim is to make sure that the military will still control the power after the election; and on the other hand, he wants to improve Myanmar's relations with the U.S. to ease the heavy external pressure on the country. The first one task is paramount to Than Shwe. It is impossible for him to sacrifice its ruling power to exchange better relations with the U.S.

Concluding Remarks

The relations between the United States and Myanmar have faced twists and turns since 1948. Actually, their bilateral relations have improved somewhat since the end of 2008. Maybe the progress could be seen as obvious, because relations were once so poor, that any improvement would be positive. U.S. strategic goals and interests in Myanmar are still to support a unified, peaceful, prosperous, and democratic Myanmar that respects the human rights of its citizens,⁹¹ which means that the ultimate goal of the U.S. is to establish a U.S. style democratic government in Myanmar. Myanmar is a relatively small country, and suffered decades of colonial rule by Britain and Japan, which make the country sensitive to external interference, especially when this intervention threatens the military's ruling status. Although both sides have realized the importance of ongoing engagement, the reality is that the United States has not received enough positive feedback from Myanmar to meet its requirements. If their bilateral relations continue to develop, the two countries will face more substantive problems. Especially the issues of Aung San Suu Kyi and the election will be serious tests for their relationship. Now, it has seemed that the U.S. has begun to take tough measures toward Myanmar again. The future development of their bilateral relations will be accompanied by struggles and compromises. The improvement process will be a long and arduous one. Uncertainties will continue to characterize the development of bilateral relations, even while the process might reverse and show improvements.

Myanmar has a strategic importance. The great influence of the United States in Southeast Asia and the whole world will make this improvement process affect not only Myanmar but also regional stakeholders such as ASEAN, China and the EU.

Myanmar: The military will continue to face a dilemma. On one hand, it has to continue to control the ruling power to protect its core interests. On the other hand, it wants to improve relations with the United States in

⁹¹ Kurt M. Campbell, "U.S. Policy toward Burma," U.S. Department of State, September 28, 2009, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2009/09/129698.htm> (accessed on April 10, 2010).

order to get a better international environment and has to make compromises in the fields of “democracy, human rights,” to give more space for the opposition to meet U.S. requirements. Then this will make it difficult for the military to control the situation in Myanmar. The prospect of the U.S. intervention will continue to affect the domestic politics.

ASEAN: The improvement of the relations between the United States and Myanmar benefits ASEAN. The Myanmar issue was an obstacle for the U.S. and ASEAN to develop relations further, because while ASEAN pursued a policy of “constructive engagement” towards Myanmar, the U.S. asked ASEAN to pursue a tough policy towards Myanmar, and put pressure of ASEAN to exclude Myanmar. The improvement of the bilateral relations has mitigated the pressure on ASEAN from the U.S. on the Myanmar issue, and has made ASEAN and the U.S. develop closer relations. The U.S. signed the Instrument of Accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia on July 22, 2009.⁹² Then ASEAN can make good use of U.S. power to balance the rising influence of Japan, China and India in Southeast Asia.

China:⁹³ The improvement of the relations between the United States and Myanmar is a benefit to China. Since the U.S. has initiated a pragmatic policy and begun to engage with Myanmar, China will maybe face less pressure from the U.S. and the international community regarding Myanmar.

EU: The policy of the Obama administration will maybe influence the EU policy toward Myanmar. On April 26, 2010, the European Council expressed “serious concerns” over Myanmar’s recently published election laws not providing for free and fair elections. The EU called for the release of the political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi again and extended the existing sanctions until April 2011.⁹⁴ Sanctions and criticism are still

⁹² Office of the Spokesman, “U.S. Accession to Treaty of Amity, Cooperation in Southeast Asia,” U.S. Department of State, July 22, 2009, <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2009/July/20090722100601xjsnommis0.9985468.html> (accessed on March 27, 2010).

⁹³ Actually, though Sino-Myanmar relations are close, but their relations are just normal country to country relations. The west exaggerates Sino-Myanmar relations and China’s influence toward Myanmar. See “China’s Myanmar Dilemma,” International Crisis Group, September 14, 2009, http://www.burmalibrary.org/docs07/Chinas_myanmar_ICG.pdf (accessed on April 21, 2010).

⁹⁴ Simon Rougheen, “After Renewing Sanctions, EU Seeks Meeting with Junta,” Irrawaddy News, April 27, 2010, http://www.irrawaddy.org/print_article.php?art_id=18327 (accessed on April 27, 2010).

the EU's main tool towards Myanmar, although the EU has said it wants to engage with Myanmar. Actually, the EU policy faces many problems. Its sanctions are also useless, and its interests in Myanmar are close to zero because the EU sanctions towards Myanmar have limited its connections with Myanmar. While the U.S. policy towards Myanmar has become pragmatic, the EU seems to still have one voice on Myanmar, but its members are now divided on the EU policy towards Myanmar. Great Britain and some countries just want to stick to a harsh stand, but France has realized that sanctions are useless.⁹⁵ This has made it very difficult for the EU to conduct a pragmatic and effective policy towards Myanmar. If the EU continues to hold its high moral standard in its Myanmar policy, and follow its current policy, it will lose more interests in the country and even in Southeast Asia. Therefore, Obama's pragmatism may stimulate the EU to adjust its policy in the near future, but that is a changing process that will also be long, difficult and uncertain.

⁹⁵ Richard Lloyd Parry, "Aung San Suu Kyi meets ambassador for sanctions talks," *The Times*, October 10, 2009, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/asia/article6867787.ece> (accessed on April 26, 2010).

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