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BURMA AFTER THE ELECTIONS IN 2010: “SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN”

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Over the past few weeks scholars and policy makers have assumed that the elections in Burma, though not entirely free and fair, would create a “window of opportunity”. This “window of opportunity” could lead to democracy in Burma over the medium- or long term. Yet, these exceptions are not only misleading; they also ignore the ongoing systematic human rights violations by the military junta, who targets ethnic minorities in particular. The ethnic ceasefire groups and their political organisations are no longer willing to accept these human rights violations. Prior to the elections, they declared that they would take care of their people.

On Election Day on Sunday November the 7th the fifth brigade of the DKBA (Democratic Karen Buddhist Army) translated their announcement into action and took control of the city of Myawaddy because Burmese regime troops had forced Myawaddy’s inhabitants to go to the polls. Expecting upcoming fights between the Burmese army and the DKBA thousands of Myawaddy’s residents crossed the border to Thailand and fled to Mae Sot. On Tuesday afternoon most of them started returning to Myawaddy after Burmese Junta troops had retaken control of Myawaddy.

But this is only the starting point of a wave of violence in post-election Burma. Ethnic armed troops are “ready to fight” having already formed an alliance to help each other in the event of an attack by the Burmese military in October.

Burmese exile groups had labelled the upcoming elections as a “Farce”, which were only organised to ensure military rule. Even though moderate parties within the parties in exile assume that Aung San Suu Kyi could hold office in medium term, the elections are not considered to be the starting point of a possible democratisation process. The only benefit of the elections is the documentation of the military junta’s *bad governance* over the course of the next administration. This could create time for the emergence of so a democratisation process in Burma.

However, the ethnic resistance groups are not willing to make any concessions in terms of time to the “new” Government. The DKBA, which broke away from the KNU (Karen National Union)/ KNLA (Karen National Liberation Army) in 1995, may have started reunification with the KNLA these days in order to fight the Burmese military together.

Conflict resolution can only be achieved by a tripartite dialogue encompassing the NLD (National League for Democracy) and the ethnic groups – if they are willing to do engage in such a tripartite dialogue. But as long as this dialogue is blocked by the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council) the ethnic resistance groups will probably consider armed force as their only opportunity. The elections could constitute a turning point because the ethnic groups could take joint military action against the Burmese government. Moreover, the democratic opposition is not willing to accept the legitimisation of the military regime through fake elections. In contrast to the ethnic groups the democratic opposition does assume that the democratisation of Burma can be achieved through a peaceful

revolution.

The international community's strategy - and especially Germany - in promoting civil society inside Burma as their main strategic approach will not lead to any sustainable democratic change. By contrast, this strategy could be seen as an engagement out of economic reasoning. The strategy can even be counterproductive, if ethnic armed groups consider the use of force as a legitimate means to achieve their objectives, because of the lack of international support.

By now, a strong international statement is requested which not only condemns the human rights violation by the military junta but also puts – unlike the poorly implemented sanctions by the European Union - pressure on the Burmese government.

Even if the possibilities of the international community to support human rights and democracy in Burma should be restricted, because of contradicting interests within the international community, the international community has to live up to its responsibility to show that human rights abuses by the Burmese government are no longer tolerated. If the international community could not undertake joint action due to human rights violations in Burma, it should at least do so on account of the recently documented nuclear ambitions of the Burmese Government.

This paper only reflects my personal point of view and does not reflect neither the opinion of any persons I talked to nor the Center of Conflict Studies. This paper is mainly based on interviews I had conducted in Brussels and Thailand this year. Among others, I had meetings with members of the NLD-LA, DPNS, KNU/KNLA, EBO, AAP, ALTSEAN Burma and international human rights organisations.

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