



Politicization of Myanmar Peace Process and Challenges

Difficulties that Myanmar peace process continued to face under the NLD-party led government get more problematic and more challenging than that of the previous government. The challenge is not only the government versus opposition ethnic armed groups, but also the internal political tension within the government branches. They and the complicated inter-ethnic group divisions, with competing as well as changing interests among ethnic armed organizations, are all posing enormous troubles for the government. So far, it is hard to point out a substantive achievement and progress made in areas of national ceasefire negotiation with Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) that have not signed the Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement (NCA). It has been one year already into office, but no new member of EAOs has been added to the list of NCA signatories. Without bringing onboard the non-signatories, implementing the nationwide ceasefire agreement to secure a negotiated settlement to end almost 70 years of armed conflict in Myanmar is unimaginable, if not impossible.

When assessing different challenges that the NLD-led government face, it is not a question of the political will and commitment to achieving peace. Rather, it is the lack of power and political clout to move the process forward as it wants, due to the inability to influence Myanmar military in its pursuit of peace. The hard truth is that if the Myanmar army chooses not to cooperate with the government, it can block the whole peace process by exercising all the constitutional powers that they wield. The main issue today is whether the Myanmar military desires to willingly support the government for its ongoing peace process undertakings, or they choose to obstruct the process. The challenge that NLD faces is what can be characterized as partisan politics. In governing the country of Myanmar and the exercising of the governmental powers, what has been obvious is that the Myanmar Army – Tatmadaw – will not be a close ally to NLD as a political party, just like they are close to the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USPD), the proxy party of Tatmadaw.

Unfortunately, what the NLD-led government is going through now is a familiar experience that they themselves were at fault of doing when it comes to the peace process. When in opposition before 2015 election, NLD was considered as a party least enthusiastic, and had minimum involvement in peace process activities. Even when involved, their participations in peace process activities, spearheaded by the previous government, appeared rather lukewarm. Some senior members of the NLD party were even calling on EAOs not to rush in signing NCA before general election of 2015. Certainly, NLD had its own



political calculation, which was simple and natural, “they had not wanted the positive progress and success of peace process to be used by USDP in its power campaign to win the general election.”

After all, it is the familiar problem of the politicking or politicization of peace process by the two major parties in their ongoing power struggles. Both parties do not want to see each other claiming and getting a credit for the success of peace process. At the end, Myanmar peace process is a victim, unfortunately.

Now, peace process analysts believe that the same tactic of ploy is haunting back NLD party as a government, facing the combined force of opposition and rebuff from Myanmar army and USDP. The combined force of opposition will not be making the peace process easy at all, instead constantly hindering the NLD government. The scale and frequency of fighting between Myanmar military and ethnic armed groups that have not signed NCA are worsening. What is troubling is that the current tensions and hostilities are all signaling to deteriorate from bad to worse for the peace process. All of these growing hostilities and tensions will create even more difficulties for the potential signing of the NCA by those EAOs willing to join the peace process.

In order to overcome these increasing obstacles from all fronts, a close cooperation and unwavering support from the Tatmadaw is absolutely essential. So far, the State Counsellor proves that she can manage as well as maintain a good working relationship with the Tatmadaw. However, as much as getting along with all the branches of the government including Tatmadaw to get positive things done for the country is necessary and desirable, how much she can influence Tatmadaw with her own vision and policies for peace process is even more crucial. Throughout the next remaining four years in office, how close she and the NLD party can get cooperation from Myanmar Tatmadaw without giving in so much of their own political beliefs and stance will be very important.

In conclusion, the NLD government will be in continuous need of an effective and competent team with enough human resources for the peace process with a clear chain of command and division of labor to not only deal with the complicated and compelling concerns, but to lead the ongoing peace process to a successful outcome before 2020.