

Myanmar's Crisis & the World

China and ASEAN Stay Silent on Myanmar Junta's Dissolution of Political Parties

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Myanmar's military regime recently dissolved 40 political parties, including the National League for Democracy (NLD) led by jailed civilian leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. But while the junta's move drew widespread condemnation from the international community, China, Russia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have stayed silent.

The NLD, like the other political parties, was dissolved for failing to re-register with the regime-controlled Union Election Commission (UEC) as required under the junta's new Political Parties Registration Law. In February 2021, the Myanmar military seized power from the then NLD government, alleging that the 2020 general election which the NLD won by a landslide was marred by voter fraud.

But by dissolving the NLD the regime has once again shown its disregard for ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus peace plan for Myanmar, which includes a call for constructive dialogue among all concerned parties.

China has also expressed its support for ASEAN's peace plan, but so far Beijing has kept silent about the junta's dissolution of political parties.

"The United States and western countries have condemned the dissolution of around 40 parties including the NLD. But China and Russia, which are exercising dictatorship, have kept silent. They don't mind if the NLD is not involved in Myanmar's politics. They don't mind if the election proposed by the junta is neither free nor fair. They only want to have a government that emerges out of the military council in Myanmar," said political analyst U Than Soe Naing.

In the days following the 2021 coup, China maintained political engagement with NLD and expressed concern when the regime revealed its plan to dissolve the country's most popular party.

A few months after the coup, the junta-controlled UEC claimed that it had found evidence that the NLD intentionally violated the law to ensure its overwhelming victory in the November 2020 election, and suggested that the party should be dissolved.

Beijing, though, said it wanted to see the NLD continue to exist as a political party.

But since then China has barely engaged with Myanmar's political parties including the NLD, while continuing to engage with the military regime and certain ethnic armed organizations (EAOs) based along the Myanmar-China border, noted Ko Kyi Sin, a political analyst from the National University of Singapore.

"China apparently assumes that it is more pragmatic to engage with EAOs rather than political

parties to help build peace in Myanmar. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why China has kept silent about the parties being dissolved. China might also be worried that its relations with the regime will be strained if it speaks out,” said Ko Kyi Sin.

As for ASEAN, which is divided over Myanmar’s crisis, bloc members are unlikely to issue separate statements about the dissolution of political parties in Myanmar, said Ko Kyi Sin. ASEAN members might meet and adopt a common foreign policy regarding Myanmar, he added.

While the regime has failed to implement ASEAN’s Five-Point Consensus, the expulsion of the NLD from Myanmar’s political landscape will make it more difficult for things to improve, said the US, Britain, Japan and Australia in their statements on the dissolution of the 40 parties.

Antony J. Blinken, US Secretary of State, said that Washington strongly condemns the regime’s decision to abolish 40 political parties, noting that it shows the junta’s continued contempt for the popular will of Myanmar’s people and multi-party democracy.

“The military’s ongoing efforts to stifle political dissent and eradicate civic space are designed to further entrench its own power and interests. This action further demonstrates that the regime’s plans for deeply flawed elections, if held, will not represent the will of Burma’s voters,” said Blinken.

The international community has called for a cessation of violence and the release of all political prisoners including Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, dialogue with all parties concerned to help solve the Myanmar crisis peacefully and the restoration of democracy in Myanmar.

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