Welcome everyone. I'm Adam Westbrook and I'm the director of the Center for Community Engagement here at Suffolk. Each year the Center for Community Engagement partners with the political science and legal studies department to write an alternative winter break service learning program and course called Conflict and Development that's taught by one of today's panelists, Professor Roberto Dominguez. This course and program is unique in that it includes an experiential service learning component, where students actually travel to South East Asia and volunteer with local communities on housing and education projects while also learning about the politics, history and culture of the region. While the program has been happening for almost two decades, the past two years we've taken groups of students to both Cambodia and Myanmar. And I've been privileged to co-lead the trip to Myanmar with Professor Dominguez for these last two years. While in South East Asia students volunteer with Habitat for Humanity and they get to know local community members and experience the culture of communities firsthand.

Once students return back to Boston they take the on-campus portion of Professor Dominguez' course, where they continue to reflect on their experience and also dive deeper into the politics, history and culture of the region in their coursework. Experiential community engagement programs and courses like this hit on two fundamental pieces of what makes Suffolk special from my perspective.
01:23 Here at Suffolk we're dedicated to experiential learning and we're dedicated to educating students to be globally responsibly citizens. So, when news broke on February 1st, the day when the newly elected government was supposed to take office in Myanmar, and we learned of the military coup d'état, which included the detention of civilian leaders like the de facto leader and State Counselor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint as well as writers, activists and others.

01:51 We were shocked and concerned for our partners and for our friends in the region. And as those of us who have traveled to Myanmar know, Myanmar was a developing democracy with fragile internal dynamics. It was by no means a fully operating democracy.

02:06 Today our hope is to have a conversation that helps the campus community and others joining us to begin to make sense of what's happening in Myanmar right now. How it got here and some of the connections that Suffolk has to the region. Unfortunately, we only have an hour, so, this conversation will hopefully be one of many that I encourage people to continue to have about what's happening in Myanmar. And we'll hear from three speakers from Suffolk today,

02:33 Roberto Dominguez is Professor of Government and teaches courses on international relations, comparative politics, European and Latin American integration

02:42 and of course, the conflict and development course I mentioned earlier, which the alternative winter break program is connected to. And as I mentioned before he's traveled
02:50 and led students on this program for nearly the entirety of the program. Professor Weiqi Zhang is

02:56 Assistant Professor in the political science and legal studies department and focuses on social

03:00 and political liberalization in closed societies with a specific focus on China and North Korea.

03:06 And we're hoping that Professor Zhang can help us understand some of the larger geo-political

03:11 dynamics in the region. Finally, Kevin Luna-Torres is a junior political science major with a

03:16 concentration in international relations and a minor in Asian studies here at Suffolk. Kevin

03:23 was a participant two years ago at our first alternative winter break program to Myanmar,

03:27 and we'll hear from his about his experience in the country and how it's impacted him. And also

03:32 Kevin has a strong disposition for service, he's been involved in all sorts of programs here in the

03:38 Center for Community Engagement and throughout campus. And is also an infantry soldier in the

03:43 Army National Guard, and has been since he started at Suffolk. So, before we start our conversation I

03:48 want to invite our audience to use the chat function to post your questions throughout

03:52 the talk. I just want to remind everyone to please try to keep your questions respectful, thoughtful

03:58 and short so we can get to as many questions as possible in the Q&A session at the end.

04:05 We probably have a variety of people on the call today who have mixed understandings about the
history, and the culture, and the political dynamics of Myanmar. And so, I'm wondering if Professor Dominguez and Professor Zhang can help us paint a picture of what are some really important contextual things that we should know about Myanmar as we're reading about what's happening in the news and that kind of thing. So maybe we'll start with Professor Dominguez.

Well, thank you very much and welcome everyone. Well, last week President Biden met President López Obrador from Mexico and they had a very friendly conversation. And one of the statements that caught my attention is that they recalled the early 20th century history, which there was a saying among the group of the dictator Porfirio Díaz back then that he said, "Poor Mexico, so far from God, so close to the United States." So, this sparked a conversation between President Biden and President López Obrador because today they revisit that phrase. And I think this is a good way to start to contextualize the current events in Myanmar. And we may say we want to paraphrase President Obrador and President Biden, we could say, "Poor Myanmar, so close to China, so far from the United States." And somehow this statement remains true because this is a very important analytical point to start by the context. This is the 15th year that democracy globally speaking, has been on decline, and not only in terms of civil rights. And this virus around the world,
06:00 even consolidated democracies have declined their performance in terms civil political rights. But

06:10 the region, particularly this region in Asia, has experienced very dramatic declines as well. So

06:17 what is happening today in Myanmar somehow reinforces an existing trend

06:24 happening in that area of the world. We may say that there was a coup d’état 10 years ago

06:31 in Thailand, we may say that the elections in Cambodia were the worst, and we have perhaps the

06:38 longest living a dictator in Cambodia, we may say that Malaysia and Indonesia has struggled

06:45 a little bit with inclusiveness, although these are these two countries are models of cruelty in

06:50 many different ways. And India in this in a very worrisome, downhill, paddle practices above all

06:58 regarding the way they understand citizenship, and particularly the case of the Muslim. So the

07:05 entire region somehow has gone into this trench. So, the first point that I wanted to put on the

07:10 table is that somehow, when we see regions that are reinforcing a practice, it's very likely that

07:19 it's harder to make to have a democracy function, so this is the first point. Let me put it another

07:26 way, somehow the democratization in the Western Hemisphere, or the transition of the Eastern

07:32 European countries was faster because of the region, the region somehow influenced in domestic

07:38 processes, so this is bad news. But this is part of a trend that didn't start last year didn't

07:43 start 10 years ago, actually it started 15 years ago as global trade. Number two,
07:50 high expectations. Myanmar became somehow a model of transition if you will, in the region.

08:00 Somehow, they tried to pick and choose from the Chilean model the Spanish model in which you

08:04 have to find some type of transition in which the military regime will be reassured that they will

08:10 behave under different angles. So, this is not the first wave of democracy, the first wave of democracy was 1888. The second wave of democracy so called The Saffron Revolution was in 2007.

08:23 And we engaging in that would be the second steer wave of democracy between 2008 with

08:32 a new constitution of Myanmar. We may say very limited in terms of democratic practices but with

08:41 a rational transition, somehow how to navigate with a military power and how to navigate with

08:49 a democratic forces and political parties. So, a third wave was reinforced by the international

08:55 community, the European Union. The UK was very important in this transition. We shouldn't forget

09:03 that the United States started again providing aid. Since 2012, has provided around $1 billion,

09:11 how much is that? It depends how you want to see it. 2012 until 2020 divided in eight years

09:20 and based on the needs might be a limited amount, but still it's part of the budget of USA

09:26 also started addressing some dialogue with the government in Myanmar, because one of the main

09:36 threats and challenges for the west and for the region is drug trafficking and human trafficking.
And there's a liaison somehow working with them, with a government in India. So there were expectations and those expectations somehow we're on the right track. There were elections in 2015, and we may see that 2015 marked somehow the starting point in what could be the third wave of democracy. Which formally speaking, we have an accumulation, very interesting accumulation between the military holding 25% of the assembly, and also practicing some type of elections and also acknowledging the leadership of Aung San Suu Kyi and not only that, it was interesting that the military agreed to have her as the first president. There are three presidents, but the first president, somehow presidents that align somehow with a view of the National League for Democracy. So somehow the transition was on the right track. Number three, the crisis. It has been quite difficult, and here I guess societal challenges played a significant role in the explanation of what is happening in Myanmar. So, the part of the problem was that somehow their unspoken promise since 2015 was to reform the Constitution in order to relocate the seat and pass several reforms in order to re-engage in Myanmar is something that the Burmese are very proud is this transition to democracy. And what happened is that in March last year actually, this was different. Somehow part of the law wanted to be or attempt to be part was to reduce the allocation of seats to the military, but for that you need somehow a constitutional reform, more than 75% of the votes,
and that didn't happen. So somehow this was indicating some tensions,

the second thing and this was perhaps immediate. The current crisis somehow is the result in what's
come, but somehow there was an answer which is the elections on November 8th. The elections in
November 8th somehow increased the strength of the National League for Democracy, the party of Aung
San Suu Kyi. The gain since it was somehow mild but it was somehow significant and somehow this
put her in a very difficult situation with the traditional wing of the military. And
an important element here is that there were some tensions also within the
society in Myanmar and this has to do with three crises. The crisis regarding the minority,
and here is a combination interesting between 24 armed groups that in their view, the government
are conducting terrorist attacks, although there is some truth in that. The other one
is the way they tried to re-engage with the 1/3% that is no Burmese, which is the ethnic majority
in Myanmar. And there are three problems that in different ways have produced tensions in the
government. The case of the Rakhine State where everyone knows or has followed the case of the
Rohingya, the case of the Kachin State, which is at the north. And there is the case of the
Shan State. The problematic cycle is similar but the one that somehow got out of control was the
case of the Rohingya because somehow, they moved to other countries and it was somehow international
displacement. What happened, this produce some tension within the government because

in the view of many the leader, Aung San Suu Kyi somehow allied with the military

and these produced tensions in the Burmese society. Nonetheless, the popularity of Aung

San Suu Kyi somehow remains high. So, number four. The study of the Southeast Asian

state is very much explained by the theories of elites. So somehow, we shouldn't forget

that the father of Burma, the father of Myanmar, was the father Aung San Suu Kyi,

so somehow understanding the military is very, very complex. Because somehow there

is an association between the business groups, the elites and the military.

Somehow the military still today is also as part of the nation.

And this is extremely important to consider, which makes that a very complicated picture. Because you

have to deal somehow with all these different groups within the military, and it is in this

regard that the elites are very important. So that societal and institutional role of the Tatmadaw,

which is the way the military is known in Myanmar is extremely important. And we shouldn't forget

that still when they are trained or you are part of the military, the motto is the triumphant elite

of the future. So, they are somehow a metastasizing society, but are part of the nation. We shouldn't

forget that, that part of those 30 generals in the 60s that liberated Myanmar actually, institutionally speaking, is the same group. So here we have a contradiction somehow that
2023-01-17 09:15:36 the leader for democratization has also to build bridges and so they collaborate with the military,

2023-01-17 09:15:42 because this is part of the internal policymaking in Myanmar, and we have to consider that as very

2023-01-17 09:15:49 important. I mentioned that because many demonize in a very romantic western view,

2023-01-17 09:15:54 the role of Aung San Suu Kyi when she went to the International Court of Justice to defend

2023-01-17 09:15:59 the state of Myanmar, this is very important. Not to defend generals, to defend the state,

2023-01-17 09:16:03 and these are two different things. So finally, the fifth point, so this is a very elite problem

2023-01-17 09:16:12 oriented country. The final point that I want to make and with this I close. The international

2023-01-17 09:16:22 instruments, so what to do from this angle? Okay, so if I had the chance to advise President Biden,

2023-01-17 09:16:29 I would say send a special envoy Beijing, it's extremely important on how to build some type

2023-01-17 09:16:39 of bridges and to find some type of connections with Russia and China that have remained silent

2023-01-17 09:16:48 regarding this crisis for economic or political reasons. So, it's very important somehow to sway

2023-01-17 09:16:55 them from the position they have, and this is not impossible, it happened with the Iran deal

2023-01-17 09:17:01 in 2013, 2014. So somehow there is always that capacity of the diplomacy in order to persuade

2023-01-17 09:17:09 others to move in different direction. He will put some pressure on the Burmese Junta today. So

2023-01-17 09:17:18 this is extremely important, the other one is to continue working with The International

2023-01-17 09:17:25 Court of Justice and with International Criminal Court that somehow both open cases
for different reasons in the International Court of Justice it's a state case that may last several years. And this is a state case in which the state will respond, not people. But there is another case in The International Criminal Court that is open, and here people can be indicted. So in this regard, and this was opened by Bangladesh by the way because it's a state party, Myanmar is not a state party, but you have more than half a million Rohingyas on Bangladeshi territory. It's very important for Bangladesh to raise the issue to The International Criminal Court. So it's very important for the United States somehow to forge this alliance with these countries. And finally, another element that is important to keep in mind is to continue working with the allies. Yesterday finally the European Union in the voice of one of the members of the military headquarters somehow spoke with a deputy a minister of the Junta in Myanmar. So, it's important to keep talking, this is extremely important and it's important to reinforce what the European Union is doing, to reinforce with a personal envoy of Secretary Guterres from the United Nations is doing, to reinforce what Michelle Bachelet is doing in the High Commissioner of Human Rights and they will both work with other countries in potentially sparking more other crisis. Which is the case of India and is the case of Malaysia that are sending back Rohingyas in this particular moment to a Myanmar, which is nonsense. So, I will close.
with number five and I guess that's the path that somehow the United States should follow.

in order to contribute somehow to ameliorate this the problems in Myanmar, thank you.

[Westbrook] Thanks, Professor Dominguez. Yeah, that was great. Just to reiterate some of the things you talked about,

the importance of understanding that democracy was on the decline through the entire region and

how that can influence Myanmar as well. Thanks for giving a little bit of an overview about some of

the internal dynamics in Myanmar as well, and then the importance of international partnerships and

in working with allies if there's an interest in actually working toward a solution to this,

so, thank you for that. Professor Zhang, I'd love to hear your perspective on some of these same

same dynamics.

[Weiqi Zhang] Yeah, I guess Professor Dominguez already covered pretty comprehensively on

most of the key points here. So, I think I will just talk a little bit about

the dominant power of the Myanmar military in a more comparative perspective.

So, in countries like Myanmar, the military has a lot of power. It's not something that

that is unique to Myanmar. So, in the neighboring countries, such as China, Vietnam, North Korea,

or further away in Egypt, because these countries, they have the colonial experience. So, during the

Cold War, it was politically natural for the military to rise in power and also claim the

title of being the protector of the nation from foreign colonizers or foreign offering impurists.
So, in the case of Myanmar, the power of the military basically persisted even after the end of the Cold War. And so, at the end of the Cold War, as many of you probably know, right? In 1991, there was a breakthrough in terms of democratization process, and then the military as an institution in Myanmar had basically the motivation to protect themselves by suppressing the protest and the democratization and as a result, put Aung San Suu Kyi into house arrest for more than a decade. And so, after the Cold War, since the security concern was much mitigated during the post-Cold War era therefore, the legitimacy for the Myanmar government or the military government switched progressively from being the protector of the nation to more of the economic growth. So as a result, if we look at the Myanmar economy in the 1990s, and also in early 2000s, you would see that the economy actually performed pretty well, right? So according to some reports, the real GDP growth rate for Myanmar in the early 2000s, it was about 7% per year, which is pretty awesome for a developing country. But at the same time, we also see that its inflation rate is also about 8% a year, which is a little bit high but still, it's acceptable. And because the economy was booming, I think that motivated the military government to be able to afford to have a little bit more political liberalization and economic liberalization. And as a result of that, Aung San Suu Kyi was allowed to play more and more roles in the Myanmar domestic politics.
However, starting in 2007, the Myanmar economy started to decline and as a result, for some reason, I don't know but the government started about, "Yeah it could be a good idea to lift the oil subsidies in a country which basically crushed the life of the normal people there, which resulted in a nationwide protests in 2007. And that became one of the triggers for the later protests and the upset from the society against the military government. And as a result of the protests, then there was a constitutional amendment in 2008 which led to a deal between the camp of Aung San Suu Kyi and the military government. And in the new constitutional amendment, the military would preserve 25% of the seats in the parliament, and I think that was a compromise or temporary compromise between the military and the opposition party, but mainly due to the nationwide protest. And I guess the rise of Aung San Suu Kyi's political party or NDP continued to become increasingly popular after that, and I think the military was no longer willing to allow the NDP to entirely take over the political authority in the country, because in the most recent election, the NDP won by a landslide. And that would mean that in the parliament, the military will lose most of the control and also based on some anecdote, there was a negotiation between the military generals, and Aung San Suu Kyi. Mostly the difference between them is that the military generals wanted Aung San Suu Kyi to promise them that the military will not be prosecuted after the election but somehow the deal was not reached. So, the military
26:08 was encouraged or was forced to make the first move to, to arrest Aung San Suu Kyi again.

26:18 That's how I view the political mechanism in Myanmar history. To some extent, it's not very

26:28 unique to Myanmar, in Egypt we see the same thing, in North Korea even though there was no political

26:35 opposition but still the military not only performs the national security function, but also

26:43 the military also performs economical function as Professor Dominguez mentioned that the military

26:49 in Myanmar also run huge businesses, right? So, part of the reason is that the Myanmar military

26:59 totally controlled the country for decades therefore the military generals, they have

27:04 the motivation and the power to enrich themselves. And another reason is that Myanmar does not have a

27:12 lot of money to fund the military, which faces a lot of domestic security issues to deal with. So

27:23 instead of asking the government to pay for the military, the military actually was allowed to

27:31 run business in order to sustain themselves. In North Korea and Egypt, they are still doing

27:41 the same thing in China during the time of 1990s, the military also could run businesses

27:48 but in the late 1990s, military was banned by the government from doing businesses. So

27:56 I guess there's also an economical reason behind the dominant position of the Myanmar military.

28:06 And a little bit about the international perspective, the relationship between Myanmar

28:12 and China is a little bit complicated. Myanmar's position is like the position of North Korea,
as Professor Dominguez said, they are too close to China, which means that they have to have positive or friendly relationship to begin with, with China. They cannot afford to have bad relations with China to begin with, and from the Chinese perspective, Myanmar has a very strategic position for the Chinese national security. Specifically, China would need Myanmar to bypass especially the American naval blockage in the South China Sea and also in the Pacific Ocean. So, Myanmar could provide China a pretty safe and reliable access to oil from the Middle East, and also Myanmar itself has a lot of oil, even though it's quite small comparing to the OPEC countries, but Myanmar does have quite a sizable amount of oil reserves but Myanmar has not industrialized enough to process its own oil reserves. So, Myanmar could export a lot of crude oil, but it does not have the capability to process them to produce actual petroleum or oil related products. So, Myanmar also rely on China for industrialization in terms of, in terms of economic cooperation. And there is actually one oil pipeline from Myanmar to China that is under construction and Myanmar also has created multiple special economic zones specifically targeting at attracting Chinese foreign direct investment in order to boost local economic growth. So, to some extent, Myanmar is put in a pretty tough position because on the one hand, they need China for economic growth, that's one. And China also need Myanmar for national or energy security. So, they have a common
30:31 interest to begin with, but at the same time, similar to other neighboring countries of China,

30:38 Myanmar government is also a little bit concerned about the Chinese dominance and rising power in

30:44 the region. So very interestingly, I think recently the Myanmar military government

30:52 said that they are willing to work with the US government to adopt an anti-China policy, and

31:00 the reason that they arrested Aung San Suu Kyi was that she was too pro-China. So, I think both sides

31:07 in Myanmar in terms of foreign policy, they are pretty close. They want to have good relationship

31:16 with China, but also, they are afraid of China as well so the best strategy for them is to play off

31:24 between China and the US at the same time in order to get some independence, that's my thought.

31:37 [Westbrook] Great, thank you Professor Zhang. I think that was really helpful, especially

31:41 how much you went into the dynamic between the military and the civilian parties and the history

31:47 of the military. And like you said, the strength of the military in Myanmar's is not unique

31:53 to countries around the world. But maybe for some of our maybe American students on the call,

32:00 that might sound like a relatively foreign thing is in the United States our commander in chief is

32:04 a civilian and not part of the military specifically. So, I think that's really,

32:10 really helpful to understand this dynamic as well. So, I want to shift a little bit,

32:16 we've been talking about high level political dynamics and geopolitical dynamics. And I want to
zoom in and go down to the ground and turn it over to Kevin, who spent two weeks in Myanmar a couple of years ago, and who has been in touch with some of our partners there since February 1st. Kevin, I'm hoping you could just tell us a little bit about your experience when you were in Myanmar, what were some of your biggest takeaways about the country, the people, what was happening there? [Kevin Luna-Torres] I would say my experience started prior to going to Myanmar, not knowing anything about the country prior. I had to ask people around me, "Do you know anything about this country?" And the thing that came up the most was the presence of the military in Myanmar and since they've taken matters into their own hands, how many casualties have happened? How many arrests? How many killings? How many rapes? How many lootings? How many burnings of villages have happened? And prior to going on this trip, thinking those things you get very nervous before you go to a place like this. And another aspect I also found prior to going was the diversity of Myanmar, there are 135 ethnic groups in Myanmar. 136 since Myanmar doesn't recognize the Rohingya. But going to Myanmar, it's very different, culturally the people are different and the religion is different. So being there, I got to see a lot of what I don't see here in America and it goes with simplest things as gestures, things of those sorts. These people want to leave that good impression to you when you go there as a visitor. But as far as their daily life,
the Burmese people faced so many challenges already as they go through a monsoon season

yearly that affects their homes, their daily lives as they have to constantly prepare for this. So

to think about this monsoon, these things that are happening with the military

and so many different things going on in their life you start to think that these people are so

strong. And living with so many ethnic groups, you have to learn about these different ethnic

groups and respect each other in a sense. And as we've seen with his military coup,
a lot of these ethnic groups have come together, so it's interesting to see these things. And

another aspect, as I was there was the position on the military. A lot of the people that I talked to

and to the people I talked to now, they were very fearful I would say, of the government/military

and that was just because of the history. In a sense they were silent, I would say.

And they were afraid to speak out, but this military coup has allowed so many people to

speak out and tell their stories especially for the Rohingya, they've been spoken out

a lot during these times about things that's happened to them. And it reminds me

as Professor Dominguez and Professor Zhang talks about the protests that happened in 2007, where

it was student led. A majority of the protests in 2007 around August, September where 31 civilians

died during these protests and it's similar to what I'm seeing now. So, there is definitely

a lot of similarities in that aspect and I could see the effects of the history. I was there on
the ground, and it played a huge role within everyone's everyday life in Myanmar, I'd say.

[Westbrook] Yeah, and Kevin, I know once you returned back, you ended up switching your major? Or your minor?

To study political science and with the concentration in Asian Studies.

Can you talk a little bit about what pushed you and what motivated you to switch what you were studying as a result to your experience?

Yeah, I was previously a psychology major with no minor and going to Myanmar and seeing how the history has impacted their everyday life and their life now, was interesting to me. And I wanted to do something about it.

When you introduced me, service is a huge part of my life. So, to be able to, at some point in my life provide for these people, whether it's by educating other people or by constantly doing things with Habitat for Humanity or keeping in contact is important to me. So, I thought changing my major to study international relations, to not only know the history, but know how it's impacting it now. And I also added the Asian studies minor, to strengthen that knowledge as well around Asia.

[Westbrook] Awesome, thanks Kevin. So, I'm curious to shift to where do we go from here? And where does Myanmar go from here? I don't expect anybody to make any predictions, because I think that's a dangerous game to play. But I'm curious to hear a little bit about what are the dynamics we should be paying attention to? Both professor Zhang and Professor Dominguez, you both started
39:02 to touch on the international dynamics. But what should we pay be paying attention to,

39:10 to better understand this as things unfold from both the international perspective but then also

39:15 from the domestic perspective inside Myanmar? Maybe we'll start with Professor Dominguez.

39:23 [Dominguez] Well, without having a crystal ball and not attempting to do any type of forecasts as

39:32 you mentioned, but a to pay attention or what should be emphasizing, any type of collective

39:39 effort in order to ameliorate the collateral damage. 60 people have been killed so far, and

39:45 hopefully it will not reach the level of the 3000 civilians in the first wave of 1988. But

39:53 it's a region that the rationale about the use of force is very different. The first element to pay

40:01 attention is international coordination, and it plays a significant role. I guess that here

40:10 the work of the European Union is significant. We shouldn't forget that in the aftermath of the

40:16 coup, actually the US Embassy with the European Union and all their embassies in Yangon somehow

40:24 tried to turn with collective press releases. So somehow, they try to coordinate their actions

40:32 in the field, I guess that this is important and should continue along the same lines. The second

40:39 one is the case of sanctions, so far, the smart sanctions somehow have been in place. Last year, I

40:49 guess that the only few sanctions of the military generals in Myanmar from the United States,

40:57 freezing his assets in the United States is actually to the general that was in charge of the
41:04 operations in the Rakhine State in 2017. So, this is an important message, is this significant or

41:11 not? Maybe he has his money China or other places, but somehow those sanctions that are targeted

41:18 to people should continue. The third element that we should continue paying attention is a

41:29 snowball that is somehow gaining more traction which is somehow an arms embargo, there are some conversations within the Security Council, it seems that is not at the top of the agenda, it's a little bit wait and see. But it has been part of the conversation arms embargo to

41:53 Myanmar, it's very important that in any collective embargo, which is not targeted to individuals, you have everyone on board. If in 2012 the United States and Europeans were able to bring Iran to the negotiating table it's because sanctions were very strategic. And somehow you have to continue develop externalities,

42:18 you don't develop someone somehow feeling the blank that the sanctions are being implemented.

42:25 The fourth element is that it reaches a time where the International non-governmental organizations rather than shying away should be more committed, and here I would say that one of the key organizations are, I don't recall the acronyms which is lawyers for political prisoners.

42:50 This is a local based NGO that is working and they are openly talking today about the cases of

42:59 1800 people that have been incarcerated. I guess that these are important developments
that we should pay attention. And the final one, I would say that it's a little matter of concern,

the position of Malaysia. I guess that it's reckless where they are doing

in terms of deportations, I guess that there must be some type of pressure on these

countries and I guess that based on that what would be in rational terms the decision tree,

the decision tree should be consolidated and to see what's the next step. But we should

understand very clearly that very much this is in hands of the Burmese people and this in hands of the people

inside a country and we have to be very careful in the way we influence our domestic processes.

Yeah, again just to reiterate a couple things that stuck out to me on what you just said

strategic sanctions targeted, right? Because there's a difference between providing sanctions

on particular people, particular leaders, and then sanctions on the country as a whole which often

have the impact of really negatively impacting the people in general, right? Versus

targeting specific leaders to make them budge. And then the second piece that you ended on, the

importance of this is something that the Myanmar people are going to have to do, and they're going

to have to be self-determined on this. It's going to be up to them with international support. But

the international community can't necessarily orchestrate the entire thing

from here. Professor Zhang, I'd love to hear your perspectives.

So, I think that my view is even more pessimistic. So, I don't think much will change in Myanmar
44:54 for a couple of reasons. One reason is that China is willing to work with anyone
44:59 who is willing to work with China. So, as I said that both sides the military
45:07 and the Aung San Suu Kyi party NDP they both cannot afford to become the enemy
45:15 of China. So
45:15 in terms of foreign policy, they have to work with China. So, from the Chinese
45:20 perspective,
45:20 which one leads the country does not really matter too much however, it is
45:27 in the interest of China to have a stable Myanmar and that's the traditional Chinese
45:34 foreign policy
45:34 principle which is, first China does not want to interfere with other country's domestic
45:44 affairs,
45:44 mainly because China has its own domestic issues to be concerned about.
45:50 And recently, I think yesterday Chinese Foreign Minister said that China is willing to
46:01 mediate
46:01 in order to solve the differences in Myanmar. So, I think that they will
46:07 probably find some power sharing solution between the military and Aung San Suu
46:16 Kyi but
46:16 definitely guaranteeing the military dominance in the future Myanmar, I think that's
46:22 pretty
46:22 sure. And the instruments of sanctions, I guess as long as the military generals are
46:28 willing to
46:28 work with China, then international sanctions will have little to no effect at all. And
46:37 also
46:37 from the international perspective, especially from the US perspective, I guess after
46:44 the Cold War in the 1990s, when the US was the only superpower in the world and the
46:55 US focused a lot
46:55 on international affairs and during that 10 years, the US did not really do anything to
rescue
Aung San Suu Kyi. So, I don't think at this point where the world is trapped in a pandemic and the US domestic issues are everywhere, I don't think the Biden administration would be focused too much on doing something to make changes in Myanmar given the rise of China in the region. So, the global power balance in Asia already changed, and also domestically speaking not only in the US, but also in European countries or in general in the developed world, or in democracies, there has been a stronger wave of more domestic oriented view. So, I don't think much will change in Myanmar, that's my view.

Westbrook] Go ahead, sorry.

[Zhang] Yeah, I also see Amy asked the question about Buddhist nationalism. So, Buddhism is the dominant religion in Myanmar, so the monks there, they were highly respected in society. And the monks also they represent the general public interest, so when you see monks coming onto the streets that means it's a really big issue.

That's the general truth in Southeast Asia, in Thailand or in Myanmar. So, the monks came onto the street in 2007 protests when the government lifted oil subsidies, but this time monks, they were much quieter according to news reports. I don't know the political calculation in the minds of the religious leaders there, but maybe they think that this time is more about a political struggle instead of fighting for the people's interest, I think that may be one of the concerns.
49:21 [Westbrook] Do you imagine seeing the monks potentially playing a role, leveraging the power that they do carry? As you talked about, they have this great legitimacy and reverence in Myanmar's culture.

49:36 yeah, do you see any role for them?

49:39 [Zhang] I think if more people are killed, then maybe monks will come out onto the street.

49:47 [Westbrook] Earlier I was going to say you preempted a question that I had written down earlier,

49:52 which was why should American representatives, American students, et cetera take an interest in

50:00 Myanmar, and do you think they will? It sounds like from your perspective Professor Zhang,

50:06 at this moment there might not be much from the American side,

50:13 but I'm curious Professor Dominguez, do you agree? Do you have a different perspective on that?

50:22 [Dominguez] Well, I guess that we should be pragmatic, not romanticize what we can do from a distance.

50:34 I guess that if we examine what happened at Suffolk University, and you can go to the Suffolk

50:45 journal archives on the 70s and the 80s. And you will notice that actually students were quite active in the 70s about the Vietnam War, extremely active. It was not from the couch, it was going to

51:01 the streets and somehow challenging the police in the streets and they were debating about the

51:11 involvement of the US in Asia. They were quite active in the case of El Salvador another place

51:21 with a Center for Community Engagement, we have taken the students to do community work there.
And in some cases, they helped to contribute to some change. In the case of El Salvador actually,
it was a representative of Massachusetts that somehow tried to narrow the scope of the Reagan administration in terms of arms transfers to the government in El Salvador. So, I guess that what is more important is the local communities in Massachusetts should engage active and if you feel that you can contribute write to your senator, put pressure on them, that's the most effective vehicle. I guess that they will be able to steer the agenda, we have seen cases that in the way that the democracy works in the United States with constituents that it can be positive, but also its vicious in many different ways. You can use the vicious and somehow put pressure on your representatives at the House or the Senate saying, "What are you doing in order to address these issues?" And send letters, you know, they have a lot of power in that regard to steer somehow some change. The other one is that remain active, this is not the time to stop travelling there, as a general we have to see when things go down to certain a stability but this is not the time to say, "No, we have to abandon them" No, this is the time to figure out different ways of collaboration.

We should not forget, and Adam you remember the part of the local people working for NGOs there. They have been working for 30 years, even under the military Junta not only in the process of democratization, they have been there and ...I know that the university there is always that risk management and all these policies that
they have are rational. But if you're talking at the personal level and you want to engage,

there are plenty of NGOs that are still some conducting in one way or the other. Sometime from Thailand, from other place close by. You can contribute in many different ways, so I guess that

there are multiple ways to remain active it’s just a matter of being willing to be active.

[Westbrook] I think that's a really great note to end on. The work that we've done there, we've tried to do work on the ground with Habitat for Humanity and with local schools in Myanmar, and in Cambodia over the last several years. Obviously, we couldn't go this past year because of the pandemic. But we're also exploring more ways to stay involved from a distance and finding ways as you were mentioning, Professor Dominguez, to get involved with local Burmese communities here.

I know in Lowell and Lawrence and that Eastern Massachusetts, there is a large Southeast Asian population. So, for those interested in staying involved, there will be more information coming out from the Center for Community Engagement about how you can get involved if this are issues that you're passionate about and interested in and working with. But I really want to thank our speakers today. Thank Professor Dominguez, Professor Zhang and Kevin Luna-Torres. Thank you for this great thought-provoking conversation today. Like I said at the beginning, I hope this
55:10 is the first of several conversations that you all will have about what's happening in Southeast Asia. And I hope today helped to provide a little bit more context for you as you're reading, and as you're trying to understand what's happening in Myanmar, so that you're going in with a little bit more understanding of what's happening. So, thank you all, have a wonderful rest of your day and I'll be looking for more opportunities to get involved. Thanks.