

# *Constructive Engagement Policy is Making Its Presence Felt*

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It seems that the ASEAN's illogical policy of *Constructive Engagement* towards Burma has made its presence felt. The brain child of Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew and Malaysia's Dr Mahathir Mohammad of letting the Burmese dictators run their course, while ASEAN continues to exploit the country's natural and human resources have reached a dead end. No doubt the ASEAN's Foreign Ministers racked their brains in Hanoi of how to handle the most troublesome member of the group as it goes nuclear and is about to threaten the region. In fact alarm bells have been going on in Southeast Asian capitals since early June when it was proven beyond doubt that the Burmese Junta intends to build nuclear weapons facilities.

Paradoxical, if not ironical, is that Philippines envoy Libran Cabactulan had just chaired the 2010 *Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty* at the U.N. headquarters in New York, where all the delegates including the Burmese delegate were urged to work towards the treaty's common goals: disarmament, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the right to peaceful use of nuclear technology in building a global nuclear non-proliferation treaty cannot do anything.

ASEAN, itself has inked a nuclear weapons-free zone agreement. This Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty came into force in 1997, the same year Burma became a proud member and started to benefit from regional protection against international criticism for its oppressive rule. Burma gleefully signed the regional nuclear weapons moratorium treaty at a 1995 meeting in Bangkok.

Against this backdrop ASEAN now faces a serious challenge of the Junta's intention and motive? Burma's close links with North Korea in the nuclear program and the delivery system where the United Nations Security Council has already imposed sanctions will be severely tested? Burma has openly flouted UNSC resolution 1874 by dealing openly with North Korea in building a network of tunnels for military purposes. This has already prompted International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) to send a formal letter of inquiry from the Junta, which was denied.

To be candid ASEAN is already grappling with the plight of tens of thousands of refugees from Burma who have fled the country due to the army's campaign against ethnic nationalities, and about three million undocumented migrant workers who have left their country's crumbling economy. Even though ASEAN's policy has not viewed this exodus a threat to regional security, we would like to know of how this nuclear threat nixes with the *Constructive Engagement* policy of the ASEAN countries?

Burmese Diaspora community clearly sees the writing on the wall and warned the ASEAN that the Junta aspires to establish Burma as the first nuclear state and the military rulers like their fellow despots in Pyongyang can hold their neighbours to ransom if they believe their own survival is at stake. The pro democracy movement of Burma can be compared to Winston Churchill of 1930s, when he alone, having studied the *Mein Kampf* clearly, sees the steps of Hitler, so also the prodemocracy movement alone see Junta's ambition ambitions and obsession which no ASEAN country would listen up to this date. ASEAN did not realise that Burma is not a team player but wants to be a captain while other players must listen to its whims and fancies.

Unlike the European Union ASEAN did not have a conscious or the heart to tackle the ongoing human rights violations in Burma being glue only to the economic aspect? At this point for those in the field of ethnic cleansing and genocide prevention is not how to stop genocide once it has begun, but rather how to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Burma is the most at risk of genocide is the very ones where Southeast Asian countries are most attracted by its human and natural resources. This is important because, up until now, there has been no community of prevention between the level of grassroots activism and the officialdom of national governments. Risk factors for genocide include a prior history of genocide, ethnic and religious divisions within society, exclusionary ideology, and autocratic rule. Burma has all these in spades.

Most genocide scholars and human rights groups agree there has already been one genocide in Burma since 1962 – that of the *Rohingya* – and there is ample evidence to suggest that government killings of other ethnic groups constitute at least crimes against humanity, if not full-blown genocide. ***Constructive Engagement Policy*** will not even think or talk about it. Early last year some countries urged ASEAN to take a tougher stand with a public appeal calling on the Junta to grant an amnesty to Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. That went nowhere. Several ASEAN nations holding tight the *Constructive Engagement Policy* rebuffed it, saying it contravened the grouping's long-standing non-interference policy in each others' internal politics. There will certainly be questions about Burma on the upcoming elections. But it is unlikely to be strong, stinging words," Chitriya Pinthong, deputy permanent secretary of Thailand's foreign ministry, told Reuters. "*Things are moving in a positive direction and we want to engage the government in a constructive way rather than condemnation even before elections take place.*"

Hence to be a member of the ASEAN is to ignore the crimes against humanity committed by its member. In the Foreign ministers meeting of ASEAN no mention was made for Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and 2,200-plus political prisoners currently incarcerated inside the country and conspicuously absent were any references to recent restrictions on campaigning announced by the Junta's electoral commission or the apparent breach of the electoral laws by the Junta's own party, the Union Solidarity and Development Party, which seems to be illegally using state resources as it fills the shoes of the government's defunct Union Solidarity and Development Association, a 27-million member junta-led mass movement. Again ***Constructive Engagement Policy*** has failed to put real pressure on the Burmese rulers. Instead it announced more cooperation on soft-focus issues such as humanitarian intervention and disaster relief, taking attention away from inaction over Burma.

Even though we hope that more pressure and concrete action will come from ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Burmese democrat movement together with its ethnic brothers in lieu with the civilized community expect and implore the international community to stand firm on the side of truth, justice and democracy. Supporting this election will only provide the regime with the legitimacy it seeks while undermining Burma's democracy movement. Discounting Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and thousands of political prisoners is like removing Martin Luther King Jr. from the American civil rights movement. Perhaps only if one of the Burma nuclear bombs fell on one of the ASEAN countries then they will wake up and realise the futility of this ***Constructive Engagement Policy***

