

Chenoweth & Stephan: Why civil resistance sometimes fails: The Burmese uprising 1988- 1990

Alexandra Baliaková, 363 648

BURMESE UPRISING 1988

- 1988: a popular uprising in Burma posed an unprecedented challenge to that country's military dictatorship (came to power in 1962)
- Spontaneous student-led protests against police violence in Rangoon quickly grew into a nationwide campaign to dismantle the junta involving large numbers of Burma's ethnically and linguistically diverse population

FEW OPPOSITION GAINS

- the temporary replacement of military with civilian rule
- holding of multiparty elections in 1990 won by the opposition National League for Democracy (NLD)
- the 1988 campaign is best characterized as a failure- a new military dictatorship came to power that ignored the election results and maintained power- stays highly repressive military dictatorship

OUTCOME OF THE RANGOON MASSACRE

- General Ne Win – steps down as president and chair of the Burmese Socialist Program Party (BSPP)
- Man responsible for the Rangoon Massacre was installed as new chairman
- Nationwide strike, mass protest- 8. august 1988
- Demands end of military dictatorship and the installation of an interim government in order to prepare for multiparty elections
- Government opens up fire
- Over 1000 dead demonstrators in three days

1990 MULTIPARTY ELECTIONS

- National League for Democracy (NLD)- over 80 %
- State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) – military-led, refused to respect the election
- Aung San Suu Kyi- under home arrest- JULY 1990
- Guerilla resistance
- Aung San Suu Kyi-unsuccesful dialogue with military leaders on democratic reforms
- SLORC- renamed to State Peace and Development Council (SPDC)- remains in control
- Opposition not in position to resist through campaigns of noncooperations

INTERNATIONAL FACTORS

- Aung San Suu Kyi- won the Nobel Peace Prize – 1991
- Sanctions from UN for human rights abuses
- Substitutions from China and India
- U.S. sanctions were weak
- International sanctions did not raise the political costs to the Burmese regime of repressing the nonviolent opposition

DOMESTIC FACTORS

- Nonviolent campaign was ineffective in producing loyalty shifts within the security forces
- Failed to present itself as a viable political alternative to junta
- Failed to alter the self-interest equation of the security forces- no incentives to challenge or disobey regime orders
- Regime divided and co-opted groups of Buddhist monks, preventing them from unified front
- Nonviolent mobilization was massive and cross-cutting

NONVIOLENT MOVEMENT

- Overreliance on single personalities
- Inability to reconcile across competing factions
- Lack of consistent information about human rights abuses
- Inability to mobilize masses at all
- Small gurrilla units with a passive support base divided along ethnic lines

RESULTS

- Both violent and nonviolent campaigns failed to raise the costs of regime repression to threatened the regime
- The domestic costs were inadequate to produce the desired results
- Mobilization was selective and leader dependent

CONCLUSION

- Mobilization may be critical determinant of success, given that a widespread, cross-cutting, and decentralized campaign may be more effective in raising the political costs of repression because of its operational resilience, mass appeal, and anonymity

SOURCE

- Chenoweth, Erica and Stephan, Maria J, “Why Civil Resistance sometimes Fails: The Burmese Uprising 1988-1990” chapter 7 in *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. (Columbia Studies in Terrorism and Irregular Warfare, 2011): 172-191.

QUESTIONS ?

Thank you for your attention!