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POLICY PAPER

Myanmar's National Unity Government Foreign Policy Agenda and Approach

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List of acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
EAO	Ethnic armed organizations
FDU	Federal democratic Union
NLD	National League for Democracy
NUG	National Unity Government
UN	United Nations

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Summary

Myanmar's shadow National Unity Government's (NUG) foreign policy is focused on gaining international recognition as the sole legitimate and democratically elected government in the country. Ever since the Myanmar military seized power on 1 February 2021, there has been rising international concern over the military's violence against peaceful pro-democracy protestors. Although several countries have called for a return to democracy in Myanmar, only a handful have shown the political willingness to engage with the NUG in its efforts to challenge the military rule. In addition, there is limited discussion and understanding of the NUG's policies.

This situation raises some key questions about the NUG's current foreign policy strategy, its strengths and weaknesses, and its ability to effectively engage with a wide range of actors to achieve its political objectives. Furthermore, it highlights the need to shed further light on the NUG's future plans, specifically in relation to forming viable and lasting collaborations with foreign governments.

This paper will take a closer look at the NUG's foreign policy strategy, identifying its current strengths and loopholes that need to be fixed. This is an extremely crucial step to promote the NUG's policies, especially in light of declining international and regional attention towards Myanmar due to other international crises (e.g. the Russia-Ukraine war) as well as ASEAN's tendency to "normalize" military rule.

Introduction

Ever since its independence in 1948, Myanmar has experienced periods of violent political struggle and civil war between ethnic armed organizations (EAO) and the central government. For the most part, the country's source of stability had been from the centralized domestic order under the military dictatorship between 1962 and 2010. Under the military rule, human rights abuses, including violent purging of political opposition and dissents, were rampant. Myanmar was also a constant subject of foreign sanctions from Western countries.

Outside of long periods of military rule, there have been periods of progress. During the 1950s, the country implemented a limited democratic system, giving greater autonomy to ethnic minority regions.² In 2011, the military established a quasi-civilian government under the Union Solidarity and Development Party. In 2015, the National League of Democracy (NLD), the civilian opposition party helmed by Aung San Suu Kyi, won parliamentary elections by a landslide, ushering in a new era of democracy. Soon, Myanmar's foreign policy became more open, certain sanctions were revoked, and aid and investments started pouring in, even as a major humanitarian crisis was unfolding in Rakhine State. But a decade of banal democratic reform and limited liberalization have failed to create long-term changes, culminating in the February 2021 coup and return to rule by the military (commonly referred to as *the Tatmadaw*), following the NLD's victory in the November 2020 general elections.

² Dinyar Godrej, "A Short History of Burma," *New Internationalist*, 18 April 2008, <https://newint.org/features/2008/04/18/history>.

What has followed is another chapter of strong-arm repression against civilians. The military displayed brutality in the face of mass demonstrations and protestors who participated in the nationwide Civil Disobedience Movement. Thousands of civilians have been reportedly killed, many were subject to torture, while more than ten thousand have been arrested or kidnapped. Sustained fighting in multiple rural regions, with reports of airstrikes and bombings, led to a high number of displaced people across the country. Myanmar plunged into chaos in a world already suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty, and food insecurity. Against the odds, the opposition movement against military violence has been stronger and more persistent, something the military failed to calculate.³

In April 2021, a parallel civilian government, the National Unity Government (NUG), was established. The NUG was formed out of a coalition of ousted NLD politicians, activists and representatives of several ethnic minority groups, based on the Federal Democracy Charter that was adopted in February 2021 by the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH)—a body of lawmakers, largely from the NLD—in the wake of military takeover.⁴ The NUG's formation is driven by the aspiration to defy the military regime and restore democratic rule, upholding the result of the 2020 general election.⁵

Yet, the international community's response to the NUG has been mixed. The majority of countries, even those who have condemned the military takeover, have kept their engagements with the NUG informal and shied away from open support.⁶ Myanmar's neighboring countries, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states and ASEAN dialogue partners, adopted a wait-and-see approach—withholding any formal recognition of the NUG.

The reason why a large number of countries, including those who may have been appalled by the violence and instability in Myanmar, refrained from opposing the military takeover needs to be explored further. On one hand, some may have to juggle with vested interests, as they do not want to lose influence in Myanmar, if any of the military were to remain in power. On the other hand, the NUG's policies on how it wishes to engage with neighboring countries and international organizations, remains very vague.⁷ So far, the NUG has only highlighted its intention to implement independent foreign policies and cooperate with those who support

³ Jasper Picard, "The Emergence of Civilian Resistance to Military Rule in Myanmar," *The Diplomat*, 8 March 2002, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/the-emergence-of-civilian-resistance-to-military-rule-in-myanmar/>

⁴ John Reed "Aung San Suu Kyi Supporters Unveil Myanmar 'National Unity Government'," *Financial Times*, 16 April 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/65d18000-f728-441e-8197-d637ac73cece>.

⁵ Alex Aung Khant and David Camroux, "Recognising Myanmar's National Unity Government," *East Asia Forum*, 19 June 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/06/19/recognising-myanmars-national-unity-government/>; Richard J. Goldstone, et al, "Why the UN Should Recognise Myanmar's National Unity Government, Not the Junta," *South China Morning Post*, 13 September 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/opinion/article/3148326/why-un-should-recognise-myanmars-national-unity-government-not>.

⁶ Sebastian Strangio, "EU Parliament Voices Support for Myanmar's Opposition Government," *The Diplomat*, 11 October 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/eu-parliament-voices-support-for-myanmars-opposition-government/>.

⁷ The idea of legitimacy and sovereignty is tied to the perception of other states. Government-in-hiding may suffer from the lack of information about its ability and competency to govern as an independent sovereign state. This impairs the capability to capture recognition from other states. Furthermore, clarity over a government's foreign policy is important for recognition and collaboration, since foreign policy is one of the primary function and power of a state, part of the virtue of its sovereignty. Some studies in governments-in-exile, although the use of the term in NUG's case remains debatable, can at least be useful to see what usually constricts their ability to gain recognition. See Stefan Talmon, "Who is a Legitimate Government in Exile? Towards Normative Criteria for Governmental Legitimacy in International Law," in Guy Goodwin-Gill and Stefan Talmon (eds.), *The Reality of International Law: Essays in Honour of Ian Brownlie* (Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 499-537; Daniel Bell and Leon Dennen, "The System of Governments in Exile," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 232 (1944): 134-147; Stephanie Roemer, *The Tibetan Government-in-Exile: Politics at Large* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 47.

democratic rule in Myanmar.⁸ While these are valid points, the NUG must emphasize its specific plans and long-term strategies to garner support from international stakeholders.

For the most part, international actors and analysts are aware of the struggles faced by the people of Myanmar.⁹ However, understanding of the NUG's plans going forward, as well as its specific short and long-term objectives, is less widespread. To address this gap, the NUG must decide how it wants to present its domestic policies to the international community, while ensuring its expectations are pragmatic.¹⁰

While Myanmar's popular revolution is a strong uniting message domestically, the international community may be more eager to understand the NUG's foreign policy strategies and vision for the future of Myanmar.¹¹ It is also crucial for both regional and international actors to understand whether the NUG has the capacity to work with the more radical sections of the larger revolutionary movement.¹² Finally, limited support from the international community may also stem from uncertainty over the extent to which the NUG legitimately represents the diverse domestic actors in Myanmar. In this regard, the NUG must convince stakeholders inside Myanmar to join its mission and gain trust, rather than only championing the NLD government's interests.

This policy paper aims to provide an overview of the NUG's current engagement strategies and foreign policy goals. The reasons for doing this exercise are twofold. First, an examination of the NUG's foreign policy will aid external actors in better understanding the parallel government's objectives, which can serve as a starting point to shape future engagements and collaborations. Second, this analysis can serve as a basis for the NUG to reflect upon its current approaches and where improvements can be integrated.

The key questions addressed in this paper are:

- What are the NUG's foreign policy priorities? To what extent can these foreign policies help the NUG gain legitimacy as a federal democratic government?
- What strategies has the NUG developed to implement its foreign policy? Who are the main external actors and how does the NUG engage with them?
- What are the NUG's foreign policy achievements? What challenges has the NUG faced

⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Unity Government, "Foreign Policy," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Unity Government*, 30 May 2021, <https://mofa.nugmyanmar.org/foreign-policy/>.

⁹ CSIS Indonesia, "The Role of ASEAN in Dealing with Myanmar Crisis: Are We Putting the Wrong Hope?" *CSIS Youtube Channel*, Webinar, 27 January 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BLa4Jk7vQ-A>.

¹⁰ The Irrawaddy, "Hundreds of Myanmar Junta Informants Killed or Wounded," *The Irrawaddy*, 7 October 2021, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/hundreds-of-myanmar-junta-informants-killed-or-wounded.html>; Deutsche Welle, "Myanmar Opposition urges International Community to Recognize National Unity Government," *DW*, February 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/myanmar-opposition-urges-international-community-to-recognize-national-unity-government/av-60635639>.

¹¹ Andrew Selth, "Myanmar, Terrorism and the Demands of International Politics," *The Interpreter*, 15 June 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/myanmar-terrorism-and-demands-international-politics>; Al Jazeera, "Myanmar Shadow Government Calls for Uprising against Military," *Al Jazeera*, 7 September 2021, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/9/7/myanmar-shadow-government-launches-peoples-defensive-war>.

¹² Benjamin Mok, "The Dilemma Facing Myanmar's National Unity Government," *The Diplomat*, 21 February 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/02/the-dilemma-facing-myanmars-national-unity-government/>; Frontier Myanmar, "'My Workplace is Like a Killing Field': Bombing Campaign Puts Workers in the Crossfire," *Frontier Myanmar*, 23 September 2021, <https://www.frontiermyanmar.net/en/my-workplace-is-like-a-killing-field-bombing-campaign-puts-workers-in-the-crossfire/>.

so far, specifically when it comes to developing and implementing its foreign policy?

To answer these questions, the authors of this policy paper will examine public statements, key documents and roadmaps related to the NUG's foreign policy, alongside interviews with key NUG officials. The following sections of the paper will discuss the NUG's agenda and goals, its approach to engaging with different sections of the international community, as well as its key achievements and challenges. Finally, the paper will provide recommendations based on the authors' observations.

This analysis highlights that understanding and engaging with the NUG's foreign policy agenda, approaches and policies is critical to all stakeholders, including the wider international community, if they wish to offer genuine support toward peace and dialogue in Myanmar. Through our policy recommendations and analysis, we also aim to contribute to the NUG's foreign policies going forward.

Charting a Path Towards Federal Democracy Union

The NUG's foreign policy agenda encompasses a number of key priorities, centered on the ultimate goal of establishing a Federal Democracy Union (FDU) of Myanmar. The NUG believes that the FDU is the only real solution to bring an end to violence that has persisted across the country for decades.¹³ By establishing the FDU under a government that guarantees democracy, equal rights, recognition and respect between its citizens, the NUG believes that it can ensure equal participation of ethnic minority groups who have long fought for a degree of territorial autonomy and self-determination.¹⁴ According to the NUG, Myanmar will continue to experience civil conflicts and people's resentment against—and injustice experienced under—the military government will persist, under the current circumstances.¹⁵ The NUG, with the help of its foreign policies, thus serves as a transitional government to bring Myanmar closer towards the aspiration of becoming a federal democracy.

Components of the NUG's foreign policy are formally elaborated in its Federal Democracy Charter:¹⁶

¹³ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022.

¹⁴ CRPH, "Federal Democracy Charter, Part – I: Declaration of Federal Democracy Union 2021," *Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw*, April 2021, <https://crphmyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Federal-Democracy-Charter-English.pdf>; Daw Zin Mar Aung, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the NUG of Myanmar in Woodrow Wilson Center, "Myanmar's Present and Future: Views from the National Unity Government," *Woodrow Wilson Center Youtube Channel*, Webinar, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_wq297W6F4.

¹⁵ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022.

¹⁶ CRPH, "Federal Democracy Charter, Part – I." These goals are further broken down into objectives that include: a) to promote the legitimacy (de jure recognition) of the National Unity Government (NUG) and Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw (CRPH) in the international community including the United Nations; b) to increase international pressures on the illegitimate military council (State Administration Council – SAC); c) to work to secure the representative seats at the UN and UN mechanisms; d) to campaign to deny international recognition on the SAC by applying the international laws and diplomatic means; e) to establish legal communication with foreign governments, diplomatic corps, and international organizations on behalf of the National Unity Government; f) to coordinate between subcommittees of CRPH and international organizations to garner the support on activities of the NUG and CRPH. See Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Unity Government of Myanmar, "Foreign Policy," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Unity Government of Myanmar*, n.d., <https://mofa.nugmyanmar.org/foreign-policy/>.

“Interim National Unity Government:

- i. shall work to get its formal recognition from the international community by collaborating with international governments and international organizations including the United Nations, according to the foreign affairs policy.
- ii. shall work on ratification of international conventions and treaties that will protect the nation and the people in line with international laws.
- iii. shall implement strategic plans of the Interim National Unity Government by collaborating with partner countries which are in favor of building the Federal Democracy Union.
- iv. shall work with diplomatic approaches to bring effective sanctions of the international community against the council of military junta and to file criminal charges in international courts.”

The NUG’s approach towards building the FDU differs from the previous NLD government’s idea of federalism. It appears that the NLD government’s approach to democratic reform was more pragmatic, in the sense that, despite regular political debates on the subject, it was not geared towards establishing a full-fledged federal state. Myanmar’s military, on the other hand, has been less keen about the idea of federalism, seeing it as a potential slippery slope towards secession.

As will be discussed in the following sections, the NUG appears to be making a deliberate attempt at portraying itself to be different from its predecessor. This attempt is not only seen in the strong campaign and work towards making the FDU a reality, but also in promises such as better policies, treatment of ethnic minorities or finding solutions to the Rohingya crisis. This likely puts the NUG in a better position vis-a-vis anti-military actors, EAOs and international supporters.

Recognizing the NUG and Abolishing Military Dictatorship

The main goals of the NUG’s foreign policy include: a) gain international recognition as the legitimate representative of the people of Myanmar; and b) gain widespread support for its struggle against military dictatorship, and c) increase international pressure against the military government, denying the military’s legitimacy as a representative of Myanmar on international and regional stages.¹⁷ These goals stem from the belief that the creation of the FDU will reestablish civilian leadership in the country and abolish military dictatorship.¹⁸ Importantly, the NUG’s approach to gaining international recognition is based on moral legitimacy, while positioning itself as the true representative of the people of Myanmar. Its focus is on carrying out the people’s mandate of fighting against the military government, as

¹⁷ As a note, as a parallel government without full function of a state yet, the majority of NUG’s foreign policy has so far been limited to the instrument of diplomacy.

¹⁸ Authors’ interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022; Authors’ interview with Myanmar’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, 24 May 2022.

echoed by its prominent members such as Dr. Sasa, the NUG Minister of International Cooperation.¹⁹

In line with this approach, the NUG has adopted an independent and active foreign policy. *Independent* refers to its vision of ensuring Myanmar remains a non-aligned country and a responsible regional actor, while establishing friendly relations with all countries for the benefit of Myanmar citizens.²⁰ *Active*, on the other hand, refers to NUG's goal to be a proactive advocate of internationally shared values such as strengthening human rights, democracy, and international laws and norms, in comparison to promoting a geopolitical narrative focused on balance of power.²¹

As part of its efforts, the NUG has been appealing to the international community to step up pressure on Myanmar's military government, especially when it comes to putting an end to violence against protestors, releasing political prisoners, including the deposed State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and President Win Myint.²² In particular, the NUG believes that lack of cohesiveness in international responses has been a hindrance to challenging the status quo. Currently, it appears that the NUG is skeptical of the prospect of negotiating with the military government, as it considers Myanmar's military to be "selfish and narrow-minded."²³ Consequently, the NUG no longer focuses on simply advocating for the reversal of the military government's policies; instead it aims to achieve a total democratic political transformation of Myanmar by removing the military government from power.²⁴ Based on interviews with Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, the current Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the United Nations, and Ambassador Bo Hla Tint, the NUG's Ambassador to ASEAN, the parallel government's current standpoint is that any settlement for Myanmar shall be achieved without the current military leadership.

Practical Objectives Amidst Grand Ambitions

¹⁹ Deutsche Welle, "Myanmar Opposition;" John Reed, "Aung San Suu Kyi Supporters Unveil Myanmar 'National Unity Government'," *Financial Times*, 16 April 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/65d18000-f728-441e-8197-d637ac73cece>.

²⁰ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022; NUG MOFA, "Declaration on Relations with Neighboring Countries and Border Security," *Republic of the Union of Myanmar, National Unity Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement No. 5* (2021), 14 October 2021, https://progressivevoicemyanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/201-10-14-NUG_MOFA-Statement-No.5-tu-en.pdf.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² NUG MOFA, "Statement on the Tatmadaw Crackdown on Protest at Kyimyindaing Township," *Republic of the Union of Myanmar, National Unity Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statement No. 9* (2021), <https://mofa.nugmyanmar.org/2021/12/05/statement-no-9-2021/>; Radio Free Asia, "Myanmar Parallel Government Rejects Talks With Junta Before Political Prisoners Are Freed," *Radio Free Asia*, 28 April 2021, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/talks-rejected-04282021184213.html>; The Irrawaddy, "Who's Who in Myanmar's National Unity Government," *The Irrawaddy*, 16 April 2021, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/whos-myanmars-national-unity-government.html>.

²³ Deutsche Welle, "Myanmar Opposition."

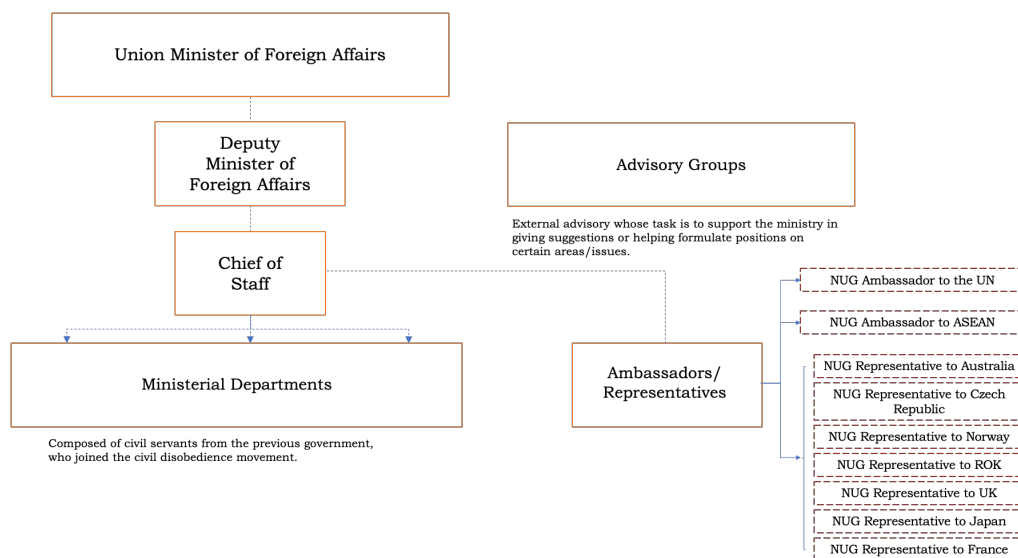
²⁴ NUG's Ambassador to the United Nations, Kyaw Moe Tun tweeted on 14 September 2021: "...Indeed all possible meaningful ways for peaceful resolution were denied by the military. People have no choice but are now in the people's defensive revolution. Together and with people's power we will win the fight." See Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, *Twitter post*, 14 September 2021, 10:56 p.m. (GMT+7), https://twitter.com/KyawTun62907405/status/1437807519137730561?s=20&t=iHx9UkcfYQ8yXH_nJZ01ug; Daw Zin Mar Aung, NUG's Minister of Foreign Affairs, suggested similarly: "The current situation is an indication that the coup has failed. The State Administration Council does not control the country. The military no longer protects the people of Myanmar, instead they are destroying the life and the interests of Myanmar. As long as the military remains in power, the people of Myanmar will continue to demand a return to democracy." See Zin Mar Aung in Wilson Center, "Myanmar's Present and Future: Views from the National Unity Government," Wilson Center, Webinar, 20 May 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/myanmars-present-and-future-views-national-unity-government>.

In addition to establishing itself as the sole legitimate government in Myanmar and working towards abolishing military dictatorship, the NUG's foreign policy focuses on certain practical objectives. According to Moe Zaw Oo, Deputy Foreign Minister of the NUG, these objectives include:

1. Promote and protect the interest of the people of Myanmar and foster regional stability and development through *people-centered foreign relations*;
2. Ensure the *standard of international law is assumed, complied upon, and implemented* in Myanmar in all areas, including freedoms and human rights;
3. *Maintain and enhance relations, including commercial agreements*;
4. *Establish close cooperation with neighboring countries* like China, India, Bangladesh and Thailand on transnational crime and border stability, healthcare, and other non-traditional issues.

Developed in part due to the NUG Ministry of Foreign Affairs' relatively lean structure and access to limited resources, these objectives are expected to support the NUG's main foreign policy goals state in the above section.²⁵

Organizational Structure of the NUG's Ministry of Foreign Affairs²⁶



Source: Authors' own research and various publications

²⁵ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022.

²⁶ Aside from the MOFA, some functions of NUG's foreign policy are also extended to relevant ministries, such as the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, the Ministry for International Cooperation, among others.

The offices of the ambassadors and representatives play a crucial role in advancing the NUG's advocacy efforts. For this paper, we interviewed the NUG ambassadors to the UN and ASEAN to further understand their agenda. At the UN level, for example, the NUG focuses on specific objectives to complement the work done by its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such as a) advocating for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution to resolve the political crisis in Myanmar by blocking military funding and arms; b) urging the International Criminal Court to investigate crimes against humanity in Myanmar, and c) the opportunity to formally represent Myanmar within the UN.²⁷ At the ASEAN level, the NUG's ambassador aims to consistently advocate for recognition, whilst urging the regional block to uphold the principles enshrined in the ASEAN Charter.²⁸ At the very least, the NUG expects ASEAN to recognize the duality of competing political forces in Myanmar.²⁹

These objectives suggest that the NUG is committed to ensuring the Myanmar crisis is a key topic on the international agenda, whilst also attempting to keep some of the incremental wins that they already have in place. This has been facilitated by the UN Credential Committee's decision to maintain Myanmar's incumbent representative to the UN.³⁰ As part of its efforts, the NUG officials engages with key actors within the international community to establish a specific "mission" or "contact group" that could facilitate collaborations between countries and international institutions (e.g. between the UN and ASEAN) or between special envoys.³¹

NUG's Foreign Policy Strategy

The main foreign policy instruments of the NUG are diplomacy and advocacy. The bulk of the diplomatic work is carried out by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, alongside other relevant NUG ministries and delegated offices and representatives in partner countries and organizations.³² Their work largely involves meeting with foreign counterparts, including officials from foreign

²⁷ Authors' interview with Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, 24 May 2022; Special Advisory Council for Myanmar, "Briefing Paper: Myanmar's Representation in the United Nations," *Special Advisory Council for Myanmar*, 11 August 2021, <https://specialadvisorycouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/SAC-M-Briefing-Paper-Myanmars-Representation-in-the-UN-ENGLISH.pdf>; National Unity Government, "Statement on the United Nations Security Council's Private Meeting on Myanmar," *NUG Statement No. (7/2021)*, *Twitter*, @NUGMyanmar, 8 November 2021, <https://twitter.com/NUGMyanmar/status/1458805064185876482/photo/1>.

²⁸ Author's Interview with National Unity Government of Myanmar's Ambassador to ASEAN, Bo Hla Tint, 23 May 2022; The NUG, for example, has repeatedly called for ASEAN member states to acknowledge them as the legitimate representative of the people of Myanmar, to work with them in coordinating the delivery humanitarian aid and medical care to Myanmar, and to assist them in depleting the junta of its capacity to inflict further harm to the people of Myanmar. See National Unity Government, "National Unity Government (NUG) of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Address to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit 2021," *National Unity Government*, 27 October 2021, <https://gov.nugmyanmar.org/2021/10/27/national-unity-government-nug-of-the-republic-of-the-union-of-myanmar-address-to-the-association-of-southeast-asian-nations-asean-summit-2021/>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

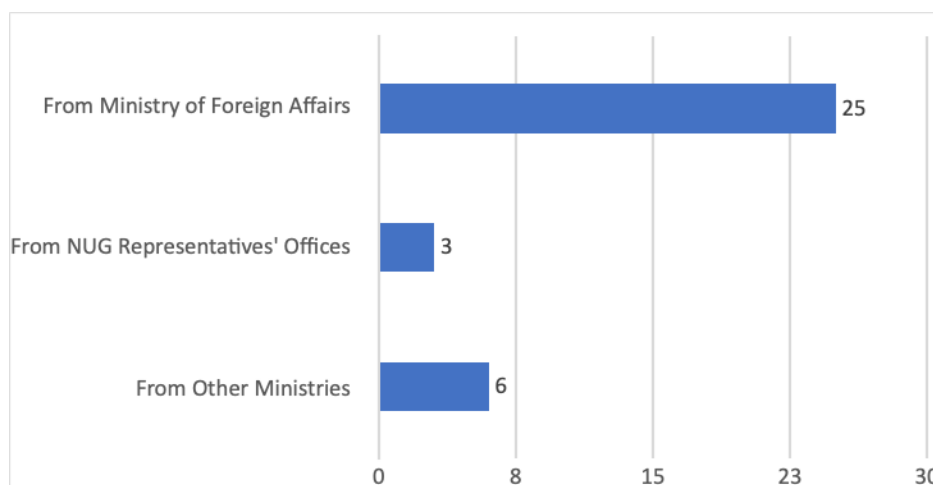
³⁰ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022. While NUG has a windfall from the UN's decision to keep the incumbent ambassadors at their seats, resolutions that aims to diminish the power of the junta has faced opposition. See Adam Simpson, "Two Governments Claim to Run Myanmar. So, Who Gets the Country's Seat at the UN?" *The Conversation*, 24 September 2021, <https://theconversation.com/two-governments-claim-to-run-myanmar-so-who-gets-the-countrys-seat-at-the-un-167885>.

³¹ *Ibid.*; Aung Myo Min, "Written Evidence from the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government of Myanmar (MYA044) to the UK," *Parliament of the United Kingdom*, May 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/36474/pdf/>.

³² Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022.

ministries and members of foreign parliaments, conducting advocacy efforts at international forums, engaging with think tanks and academia, as well as amplifying their voice through online platforms such as their own website and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The NUG's advocacy work also involves working closely with Myanmar diaspora across the world, including those working in commerce associations and celebrities that support democratic reforms.³³ The NUG also works with and receives support from foreign law firms and lobby groups.³⁴

NUG Representatives Attending Recorded Meetings with Foreign Counterparts



Source: Authors' compilation from various publicly available sources.³⁵

Various NUG ministries, including the Ministry of International Cooperation, Ministry of Women, Youth and Children's Affairs, and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, carry out certain aspects of foreign policy. Each ministry has its own set of mechanisms, channels and stakeholders/communication counterparts, with different foreign policy functions delegated as per their areas of specialization.³⁶ According to our research, the Ministry of International Cooperation led by Dr. Sasa focuses on gathering support from like-minded countries to promote the NUG's vision, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs coordinates these activities and chairs the International Affairs Committee which conducts regular weekly meetings with all other ministries.³⁷

Based on our observation, the NUG's diplomacy in practice revolves around three key narratives: a) recognizing itself as the legitimate government of Myanmar; b) denying legitimacy to the military government; and c) appealing to the international community to

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Authors would like to thank M. Rifqi Daneswara for his assistance in helping with the compilation of the data.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

improve the dire humanitarian situation in Myanmar. To gain international recognition, the NUG's strategy is to highlight that the root cause of all crises in Myanmar is the political crisis born out of the struggle between democratic forces and the military dictatorship, and that the only real solution is the path towards establishing the FDU. The NUG does this by providing rapid situational analysis on key political and economic developments, including damages and suffering faced by the people, the overall humanitarian situation, how the ongoing crisis is affecting neighboring countries, and their gradual wins against the military government.³⁸ This is done to inform the international community that the political struggle, and by extension the instability born out of it, will persist if the people's voices are ignored.

The NUG also appeals to the international community to gain support for its activities. A key priority in this appeal is that international aid be delivered through networks and delivery systems the NUG is part of or supports.³⁹ The NUG strives to showcase its capacity to be the representative government of Myanmar by emphasizing its people-bestowed mandate, displaying its ability to deliver aid and other administrative functions of a government in comparison to the military government. This includes highlighting its ability to control and maintain cross-border mechanisms, policies, infrastructure and border security, while reiterating its readiness for international collaboration on technical matters that can help alleviate people's suffering.⁴⁰ In addition, the NUG has emphasized that it has the capacity to work with the international community in delivering emergency responses in a true and transparent manner, as opposed to the military government, which is seen as likely to misuse the international aid they receive.⁴¹

³⁸ NUG MOFA, "Declaration on Relations with Neighboring Countries and Border Security;" Myo Min, "Written Evidence from the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government of Myanmar (MYA044) to the UK;" Zin Mar Aung, in Mizzima, "National Unity Government Issues Statement as ASEAN Meets to Discuss Myanmar Crisis," *Mizzima*, 18 February 2022, <https://mizzima.com/article/national-unity-government-issues-statement-asean-meets-discuss-myanmar-crisis>; Dr. Sasa in Synergy Policies Online Discussion, "Speaking Up: ASEAN Reactions to the Ukraine Crisis," *Dinna Prapto Raharja Youtube Channel*, 8 March 2022, <https://youtu.be/LEf5eLotbUc>. Observers have noted that the NUG's path to recognition models over the way parallel government gain international recognition in Venezuela, under the leadership of Juan Guaido, who was recognized by some countries as president after the country's contentious 2018 election. See John Reed, "Aung San Suu Kyi Supporters Unveil Myanmar 'National Unity Government'," *Financial Times*, 16 April 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/65d18000-f728-441e-8197-d637ac73cece>.

³⁹ The NUG suggests that humanitarian assistance should be delivered via border countries, such as Thailand, India, or China, through the networks of civil societies and ethnic organizations, rather than junta delivery system. See Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, "Position on International Humanitarian Assistance in Myanmar/Burma," *Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management*, 19 June 2021, <https://mohadm.nugmyanmar.org/2021/06/30/position-on-international-humanitarian-assistance-in-myanmar-burma/>; also Zin Mar Aung, in Mizzima, "National Unity Government Issues Statement."

⁴⁰ Sasa, in Gen. Sa Nikamui, "Dr. Sasa's Address to the International Communities Through Meetings with Senior Government Officials from Different Countries," *Ministry of International Cooperation, National Unity Government of Myanmar*, 12 May 2021, <https://moic.nugmyanmar.org/h-e-dr-sasas-address-to-the-international-communities-through-meetings-with-senior-government-officials-from-different-continents/>; Reed, "Aung San Suu Kyi Supporters;" Zin Mar Aung, "How to Defeat Myanmar's Military," *New York Times*, 16 April 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/16/opinion/yanmar-military-coup.html>; Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, "Position on International Humanitarian Assistance in Myanmar/Burma;" NUG MOFA, "Declaration on Relations with Neighboring Countries and Border Security;" Sasa, in Gen. Sa Nikamui, "H.E. Dr. Sasa's Address to the Parliamentarians of the United Kingdom" *Ministry of International Cooperation, National Unity Government of Myanmar*, 13 May 2021, <https://moic.nugmyanmar.org/h-e-dr-sasas-address-to-the-parliamentarians-of-the-united-kingdom/>.

⁴¹ NUG MOFA, "Statement on the Tatmadaw Crackdown on Protest at Kyimyindaing Township." The NUG has tried to display its capacity as a provider of basic necessities to the people of Myanmar. It has advocated health programs, such as the COVID-19 vaccine rollout program sought from third parties like the UN-affiliated COVAX, even when they have less influence to access urban areas and enough means to guarantee the security of humanitarian workers entering the country. See The Irrawaddy, "Myanmar's Shadow Government Plans COVID-19 Vaccine Rollout," *The Irrawaddy*, 27 August 2021, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-shadow-government-plans-covid-19-vaccine-rollout.html>.

The NUG strives to portray itself as different, not only from the military government, but also to an extent from the previous NLD government. The NUG looks to leverage its position as a government that elevates attention towards human rights issues and inclusivity, including the struggles faced by the Rohingya people, and shows its commitment to adhering to international norms.⁴² Furthermore, the NUG's insistence that it merely conducts defensive wars and that all of its actions respect international norms indicates its desire to differentiate itself from the military government, which has engaged in war crimes.⁴³

Holding the Military Government to Account

Along with its diverse cabinet membership, the NUG has tried to display a more daring departure from the NLD government's policies, such as offering potential citizenship to Rohingyas and accepting the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction and role in reviewing the crimes committed against the Rohingya people since 2002, including the alleged genocide in 2017.⁴⁴

The NUG's efforts to deny the military government any formal representation or recognition at international forums underscores the military's illegitimate claim to power, shedding light on atrocities it has committed and lack of accountability while protesting against other countries' foreign policies deemed favorable to the military. The NUG's core argument is that the military should not be recognized as a representative of Myanmar due to its disdain for internationally shared values on human rights. In this regard, the NUG's main focus is on denying the Myanmar military invitation, attendance, and representativeness at key international forums, especially within UN bodies.⁴⁵

The NUG seeks more targeted sanctions against Myanmar's military, as well as businesses and entities associated with military leaders.⁴⁶ It does this by appealing to countries at international forums such as the UN, as well as bilateral connections with countries who share these concerns and are willing to do more against the military. The NUG has emphasized the importance of cutting ties with military-led firms and conducting due diligence on human rights standards, thereby contributing to Myanmar's nation-building activities.⁴⁷ Priority is given to the oil and gas sector and the mining industry, which are notoriously dominated by military-led businesses or have businesses associated with top military personnel. The NUG has also urged the banking industry to prevent transactions and financial streams to the

⁴² Myo Min, "Written Evidence from the Ministry of Human Rights of the National Unity Government of Myanmar (MYA044) to the UK; Reed, "Aung San Suu Kyi Supporters;" National Unity Government, "National Unity Government (NUG) of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Address to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit 2021."

⁴³ National Unity Government, "National Unity Government (NUG) of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar Address to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Summit 2021."

⁴⁴ National Unity Government Myanmar, *Twitter post*, 20 August 2021, 10:22 p.m. (GMT+7), <https://twitter.com/NUGMyanmar/status/1428739347717648389>; Anthony Deutsch and Poppy Mcpherson, "Myanmar Junta, Ousted Government Fight for Recognition at Top U.N. Court," *Reuters*, 18 February 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/myanmar-junta-ousted-government-fight-recognition-top-un-court-2022-02-17/>.

⁴⁵ Zin Mar Aung, "Union Minister for Foreign Affairs Zin Mar Aung – Press Statement on ICJ," *Twitter*, @ZinMarAungNUG, 21 February 2022, <https://twitter.com/ZinMarAungNUG/status/1495718550467715072>.

⁴⁶ National Unity Government, "Sanction Policy," *Republic of the Union of Myanmar National Unity Government*, 9 November 2021, <https://assets-mol.nugmyanmar.org/images/2022/02/Myanmar-Sanctions-Policy-English-Version.pdf>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

military.⁴⁸ To support these businesses, the NUG has highlighted that it shall protect the interests of investors who cooperate with its mandate.⁴⁹ Last but not least, the NUG has been advocating for a UN resolution to impose a global arms embargo on the military government.

Engaging with Foreign Counterparts

With respect to denying legitimacy and international representation to the military government, the NUG has certain concerns regarding the policies of international humanitarian agencies. For example, the NUG has highlighted that international humanitarian agencies should respect the fundamental right of Myanmar citizens to determine their own political future, whilst adhering to the independence and neutrality of aid.⁵⁰ An important issue is the partnership between ASEAN, UN (particularly the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs), and the military government's task force on humanitarian assistance to deliver international aid to Myanmar, which appears to be giving political leverage to the military.⁵¹

As far as appealing to the international community the NUG conducts regular reporting on humanitarian crises in Myanmar, including threats to civilian lives, and publishes data on the military's activities. All of these key narratives are conveyed through a number of instruments—regular foreign policy updates sent via letters to ensure foreign counterparts are updated with the latest facts, plans and the NUG's progress; statements, announcements and responses to major international events share via the NUG's social media pages and official publication channels; and direct approaches, including backdoor diplomacy with countries willing to communicate with the NUG (particularly with foreign embassies based in Yangon).⁵²

One strategy that needs to be highlighted is the NUG's emphasis on responding to and seeking clarification from its foreign counterparts on certain unfavorable policies, including instances where policies lean towards empowering the military government's claim to legitimacy.⁵³ The NUG attempts to remind its foreign counterparts that they need to think about the long-term stability of Myanmar, which can only be made possible by establishing the FDU.⁵⁴

The NUG uses specific strategies to maximize its engagement with certain international platforms and countries. With ASEAN member states, for example, the NUG's diplomatic focus is on providing its counterparts with key information such as its standpoint on various regional initiatives, progress on ASEAN's Five Point Consensus, updates on reaching a negotiated

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Unity Government of Myanmar, "Who Can Make the U-Turn If Myanmar is Turning into a Failed State?" *Myanmar Updates* 2, no. 3 (2022), <https://mofa.nugmyanmar.org/2022/03/02/newsletter-volume-02-no-03-of-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-national-unity-government-of-myanmar/>; National Unity Government, "Sanction Policy."

⁵¹ The Irrawaddy, "Myanmar's NUG, Allied EAOs Urge ASEAN, UN Not to Work With Junta on Aid," *The Irrawaddy*, 1 June 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/myanmars-nug-allied-eaos-urge-asean-un-not-to-work-with-junta-on-aid.html>; The Irrawaddy, "ASEAN's Plan to Deliver Aid to Myanmar via Junta Condemned," *The Irrawaddy*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/aseans-plan-to-deliver-aid-to-myanmar-via-junta-condemned.html>.

⁵² Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

settlement to ongoing conflict, as well as other countries' latest positions on the Myanmar crisis.⁵⁵ These efforts are conducted via direct channels, including ministerial meetings (both formal and informal), and indirect channels such as periodical statements and position papers.⁵⁶ Through these efforts, the NUG's aim is to receive ASEAN's humanitarian aid and open established channels of communication (both official and unofficial) with ASEAN counterparts so that they can truly and effectively assist in resolving the crisis.⁵⁷

The NUG reaches out to the wider Southeast Asian public through civil society organizations and parliament members/people's representatives. At the UN, the main strategy is to ensure that no country recognizes the military government, whilst highlighting the legitimacy of the NUG and the CRPH.⁵⁸ These efforts are carried out by Ambassador U Kyaw Moe Tun by delivering statements, directly approaching relevant UN member states, and sending out weekly updates and legal perspectives to countries that have expressed concerns over the Myanmar crisis. The Ambassador also bilaterally engages with the UN member states' permanent representatives, the UN Secretary General, and the President of the General Assembly at multilateral forums or on the side-lines of bigger events.⁵⁹

Collaborating with Counterparts: Expectations and Means of Engagement

The main target of NUG's diplomacy and advocacy efforts are countries that are open to communication and engagement. While priority is given to those that have an embassy in Yangon, the NUG also appeals to the constituents of other countries, informing them of the crisis and their vision for Myanmar.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Author's Interview with National Unity Government of Myanmar's Ambassador to ASEAN, Bo Hla Tint, 23 May 2022.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Authors' interview with Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, 24 May 2022.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Authors' interview with Deputy Foreign Minister of the National Unity Government of Myanmar, Moe Zaw Oo, 25 April 2022.

NUG’s Diplomacy Target Country Engagement Matrix

NUG’s Foreign Policy Targets	Global Like-Minded Countries/Actors	Like-Minded Regional Countries	Important Neighbouring ASEAN Countries	ASEAN Like-Minded Countries	Neutral Neighbouring Countries	Less-Open ASEAN Countries
<p><i>Value for NUG</i></p>	<p>NUG’s cause and leverage, including to restore democracy and deny the illegitimate claim of the junta is more in line with the values of like-minded countries (human rights standards).</p>	<p>Important countries for NUG’s recognition and support.</p>	<p>Strategic importance in cross-border issues, including on humanitarian corridor and aid delivery.</p>	<p>Like-minded ASEAN countries are those more open to engaging with the NUG, even if most of them are through informal meetings.</p>	<p>Crucially relevant to the Myanmar crisis due to their proximity with the country.</p>	<p>Important countries as part of ASEAN’s mission to Myanmar.</p>
	<p>Countries representing “the free and democratic world” – as the NUG calls it – have been those most supportive and most assertive in supporting NUG’s cause, including for Federal Democracy.</p>	<p>Countries with significant economic leverage and presence in Myanmar.</p>		<p>Countries that are outspoken in favour of sharing concern with the people of Myanmar. Tend to be more open for frank discussions.</p>	<p>Has ties with certain ethnic armed organizations.</p>	<p>Seen as less willing to speak on behalf of defending an international norm, laws, and order.</p>
	<p>Strongest support have come from the people of these countries, such as from the European Parliament and the French Senate.</p>			<p>ASEAN is seen as an important entity in determining NUG’s recognition as well as support to solving the crisis, including on issues like food security and internal displacement. Like-minded countries in ASEAN are focal points to share NUG’s position on these matters.</p>	<p>Has significant economic presence and leverage in Myanmar (particularly China).</p>	<p>Countries have inclination to support the political force in Myanmar that is presumed to have the ability to control territory.</p>

<i>NUG’s Expectations</i>	Hope for gradual move towards formal recognitions, to tap into further support.	Expects consistent support and aid for the benefit of the people of Myanmar.	Expects the political elites’ behavior to gradually reflect more the position of the civil society and grassroots level movement supportive of the Myanmar issue.	Hope for further facilitation of bilateral communication to better coordinate practical cooperation.	Expects their support to ASEAN’s mission in Myanmar.	None to small expectation of their gradual opening to NUG’s presence as a political force in Myanmar’s political struggle.
	Hope for more assertive sponsorship of NUG’s cause in international platforms like the United Nations (e.g., through pushing for resolution).			Hope for bilateral opening of engagement with the NUG in delivering regional humanitarian assistance.		
	For countries like US, hope to take up role to lead and coordinate like-minded countries and partners to block the junta’s revenue streams and cut of its access to weapons and financing.			Hope for them to be consistent drivers of the implementation of ASEAN values based on the ASEAN Charter and the Five-Point Consensus.		
				Hope for more leadership in ASEAN to press for accountability for the crimes against humanity conducted by the military junta and to do more to address regional strategic issues like Myanmar.		
<i>Simplified Tier to NUG’s Cause</i>	I	I	I	I	II	III

<p><i>Specific Strategy Employed by NUG</i></p>	<p>Pushing for more convincing and sustainable initiatives aimed to support shared goals with the NUG.</p>	<p>Continues appeal for practical support aimed to the most needy of the Myanmar people.</p>	<p>Attempts to gain room for communication and engagement.</p>	<p>Pushing for more established communication (e.g., establishment of on ground representative office), via first and foremost countries who have officially open communication with NUG. The NUG calls this establishing a close "walking relations."</p>	<p>NUG's approach towards neutral neighbouring countries can be described as prudent. NUG mainly tries to persuade contacts that democracy in Myanmar is beneficial to the country, as it will offer a more sustainable stability in the long run. NUG also tries to persuade the country not to support and legitimize the junta.</p>	<p>Advocate for external push from the international community to encourage a different position for less like-minded ASEAN countries.</p>
	<p>Specific to countries that are dialogue partners of ASEAN, the NUG advocates for their leadership to convince ASEAN authorities and leadership for a more assertive mission towards Myanmar, as well as to support ASEAN in the creation of a viable working mechanism for their mission in Myanmar.</p>			<p>Appeals to countries' constituents, including parliaments and CSOs.</p>		
	<p>Appeals to countries' constituents, including parliaments.</p>				<p>NUG has been more critical to the country's minimal enthusiasm to the Myanmar crisis.</p>	

<i>Challenges for the NUG</i>	Countries positions are subject to pragmatism, propensity of success of their actions, and the attention of their own constituents on the Myanmar issue.	Certain like-minded countries have on-ground stakes in Myanmar that presents limits to their foreign policies and the possibility for their formal acknowledgement to the NUG.	Gap between civil society aspirations and decision makers on the country's role towards the Myanmar issue.	Implementation of FPC is hindered by institutional limitations of ASEAN.	Pragmatic national interests and considerations may prevent more favorable positions to NUG's cause.	Propensity to seeing who is in power has at times lead them to produce behaviors that could potentially strengthens the junta.	
				Their role in ASEAN is constrained by ASEAN's perceived disunity and lack of leverage to change the military's behavior.			Possible lack of openness to elevate engagement with the NUG.
				Lack of mechanism to change status quo to junta's uncooperative behaviour.			
				Regional institutions like AICHR and AHA Center are seen as not up to task.			

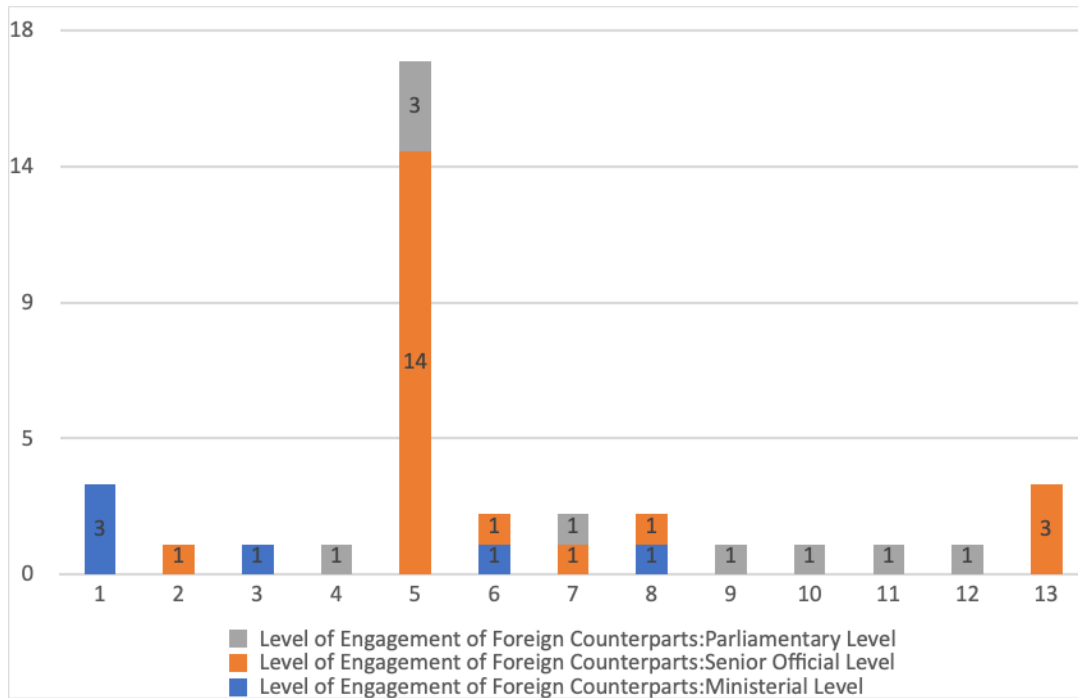
Source: Author's analysis based on various sources.

Achievements and Challenges

Achievements

Since its formation, the NUG has developed several strategies and initiatives aimed at improving the effectiveness of its foreign policies. To establish a global presence, the NUG has opened offices in seven countries, namely Australia, Czech Republic, South Korea, United Kingdom, France, Japan and Norway. Some countries have opened formal channels of communication with the NUG's representatives, although most of these engagements are currently limited to parliamentary members or senior officials.

Recorded Number of Meetings between NUG Representatives and Foreign Counterparts



Source: Authors' compilation from various publicly available sources.⁶¹

Despite NUG's challenging path to gain more formal recognition from foreign governments, its alternative strategy to prevent recognition of the military government, has yielded some successes. The UN decision to maintain the status quo position of U Kyaw Moe Tun as Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the UN, while waiting for the Credential Committee's decision should be regarded as an achievement for the NUG. As pointed out in the previous section, U Kyaw Moe Tun regularly communicates with other Permanent

⁶¹ Authors would like to thank M. Rifqi Daneswara for his assistance in compiling the data.

Representatives, including those representing Southeast Asian countries that are more willing to engage with the NUG's policies.

In addition to this, NUG has appointed U Bo Hla Tint as its Ambassador to ASEAN, although he is yet to be formally recognized by the regional block. Currently, U Bo Hla Tint shares the Ambassador position with incumbent U Aung Myo Myint, who is a career diplomat from the previous administration. The NUG's next goal, based on our conversation with U Bo Hla Tint, is to open an office in Jakarta, home to the ASEAN Secretariat.

Another highlight is the meeting between Malaysian Foreign Minister, Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah's and the NUG's Foreign Minister Zin Mar Aung on the sidelines of the US-ASEAN Summit in Washington D.C. in May 2022. The meeting was seen as Malaysia's decision to recognize the NUG as the legitimate government of Myanmar. Later, Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah made a public statement urging the ASEAN Special Envoy to engage with the NUG and the National Unity Consultative Council, the forum that brings together coup-opposition forces (elected MPs, EAOs, and anti-coup movement groups). Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah also shared that the ASEAN Special Envoy has welcomed the opportunity to engage with the NUG.⁶² However, it is uncertain whether ASEAN members will indeed follow suit as there has been no confirmation whether this idea has been thoroughly discussed within the regional block. Furthermore, there have been unconfirmed reports that the decision to recognize the NUG was Dato' Saifuddin Abdullah's personal opinion, and not a definite policy. Nonetheless, these steps represent a major boost for the NUG and Myanmar's Civil Disobedience Movement.

Challenges

Despite these achievements, the NUG has ultimately faced several challenges. First, it is clear from the previous sections that very few ASEAN member states and neighboring countries have openly responded to the NUG's diplomatic efforts. Most of these countries prefer informal, back-door engagement, which U Bo Hla Tint refers to as *working relations*.

While these working relations might be useful to a certain extent, they are unlikely to be sustainable in the long run since the military regime has continuously pushed for formal interactions with ASEAN governments. A recent example would be the ASEAN Chair's (Cambodia) decision to work with Myanmar's military government to set up a Coordination Meeting with the so-called Myanmar National Task Force. The goal was to discuss ASEAN's humanitarian assistance to Myanmar, as well as highlight its willingness to invite a representative from the regime's Defense Ministry. Such gestures would consequently lead to the normalization of military rule, without demanding any significant changes to the military government's behaviors and policies.⁶³

⁶² Radio Free Asia, "Malaysian FM: ASEAN's Myanmar Envoy Welcomes Informal Talks with NUG, NUCC," *Radio Free Asia*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/asean-nug-05112022194116.html>.

⁶³ NUG's precondition of engagement with military: a) not with current leadership; b) stop of all violence; c) release of all political prisoners unconditionally, without political restriction. After that, the next mission to provide safe passage of the internally displaced people and refugees (with international observation) and also to finally implement the effective, non-discriminatory delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Furthermore, ASEAN's decision to refrain from interfering in the Myanmar crisis has ramifications at the UN level. After the military seized power in February 2021, interactions among ASEAN representatives became awkward. The so-called "ASEAN New York Committee Meetings," a regular meeting between ASEAN permanent representatives at the UN headquarters in New York held every three months, have become irregular and informal in nature. From previously being able to discuss substantive and specific political issues that contribute to joint statements, these meetings have become informal gatherings to discuss thematic and procedural issues, whilst avoiding discussion on the Myanmar crisis.⁶⁴ In addition to ASEAN states, other key regional actors have also not shown any clear intention on their part to engage with or recognize the NUG. For instance, despite calling for stability in Myanmar, representatives from Japan, China, and India did not accept the NUG's invitation to attend diplomatic briefings held in Yangon.

Second, while the UN General Assembly Resolution that calls upon all member states to prevent the flow of arms into Myanmar was adopted in June 2021 with 119 out of 193 member countries supporting the draft, the fact remains that it is a non-binding resolution that has failed to support the NUG's foreign policy. Despite the NUG's efforts to appoint its Permanent Representative of Myanmar to the UN and push for a more effective Security Council resolution, most of the UN member states are still uncertain about the parallel government's proposal, most likely due to the lack of support from countries that are permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In addition, it has become obvious that countries like China and Russia are unlikely to put pressure on Myanmar's military government—while China has no appetite to support resolutions aimed at improving human rights in Myanmar, Russia is a key arms supplier to the Myanmar military, and supports the military government. The absence of a Security Council resolution makes international response to the Myanmar crisis rather weak, especially when compared how countries across the world have responded to the Russian military action against Ukraine. It is also worth noting that while permanent representatives of various countries may be supportive of the pro-democracy movement in Myanmar, this view may not be shared by their respective capitals.⁶⁵

Third, the Myanmar military has announced that it plans to hold general elections in 2023, however, many international spectators believe that this election will be far from free and fair. In addition, there is constant fear that the military leadership will refuse to accept any outcome that is unfavorable to them. Within this context of looming domestic uncertainty, the NUG faces several tough challenges when it comes to devising policy plans and specific timeframes. In the coming months, the NUG will need to develop new policies and strategies depending on the developing situation in Myanmar. Finally, the NUG is concerned that the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine could result in waning attention towards the political crisis in Myanmar.

⁶⁴ Authors' interview with Myanmar's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Kyaw Moe Tun, 24 May 2022.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Recommendations

From our analysis, we understand that the NUG's foreign policy is still centered on appealing to like-minded countries and seeking their support to establish long-term stability in Myanmar. While these policy efforts need to be sustained, going forward, the NUG will likely benefit from a stronger display of its capacity by appealing to the more pragmatic section of the international community, especially relevant parties like its ASEAN neighbors, such as Thailand and Indonesia, as well as countries like India.⁶⁶ To do this, the NUG must pursue a more open channel of communication by focusing on viable strategies that are of interest to these countries. Without such strategies, the NUG will face difficulty in tenaciously bridging the gap between its expectations from the international community vis-à-vis the actual role the international community can play to resolve the Myanmar crisis.

The following are our recommendations:

First, given the Indonesian ASEAN chairmanship of 2023 and the pivotal role of ASEAN, it is critical for the NUG to engage with the regional block. Despite ASEAN's slow responses, which reflects its divided position, on the Myanmar crisis, it remains an important institution that can ideally serve as a middleman to bring all stakeholders together. On one hand, ASEAN can never truly neglect the crisis since it happens within the region. On the other hand, as much as various external powers want to help, it will be extremely hard for them to gain the military's trust, let alone access to directly enter and mediate the crisis. In fact, these countries have clearly elucidated that they want to have ASEAN at the forefront which many claimed as hiding behind ASEAN. The problem lies with whether ASEAN can have an internal leadership which can sustain attention on the Myanmar crisis. Therefore, the NUG should seize the momentum of Indonesia's chairmanship in 2023 to increase pressure on ASEAN to implement the Five-Point Consensus. It should first push Indonesia to develop a specific terms of reference for the ASEAN Special Envoy, who scrutinizes the envoy's mandates and authorities, as well as institutionalizes the envoy's role which is particularly reflected in a longer term of their office for at least 3 years period.

Second, given that the military's plan to hold elections in 2023 coincides with the Indonesian chairmanship of ASEAN, the NUG should treat this as a deadline to prevent any recognition of the military government. Even as the NUG works towards recognition of Myanmar's November 2020 election result, it should be ready with a back-up plan. In addition to increased communication with EAOs, the NUG should urge foreign governments to not accept invitations to be election observers, if the military does not show any intention to hold free and fair elections.

Third, the NUG should prioritize efforts to open its office in Jakarta, although with minimum exposure to the public. This is important to facilitate more interactions with the ASEAN Secretariat as well as with the Indonesian government to intensify ASEAN's efforts in resolving the Myanmar crisis.

⁶⁶ For example, to display the kind of assurance they can give, such as specific plans and capabilities to deliver aid, to the international community for them to truly support to the people of Myanmar. Another example would be to continue to persistently convey practical assurance that the NUG can give to protect on-ground business interests of foreign countries.

Finally, the NUG should continue its strategy of engaging with parliaments of different countries. In particular, it should focus on working with parliaments of ASEAN countries, starting with Indonesia. For example, the Indonesian parliament used to have the so-called Myanmar Caucus. The NUG should push for its reestablishment as a platform to discuss strategies to restore democratic rule in Myanmar.

Appendix. Notable Official Resolution/Declaration of International Recognition for the NUG

No.	Country	Executive	Legislative
1	Japan	-	Japan's lower houses adopted resolutions condemning the Coup and calls for return of Democracy on 8 June 2021
2	France	-	French Senate recognized the NUG as the legitimate representative of the people of Myanmar on 5 October 2021
3	European Union	-	The European Parliament passed resolution P9 TA (2021)0417 declaring the NUG as the sole legitimate government of Myanmar on 7 October 2021
4	Czech Republic	The Czech Republic declared firm position not to recognize "the new regime" as the Government of Myanmar, "support the Committee Representing Pyidaungsu Hluttaw(CRPH)," and "welcome the formation of the National Unity Government (NUG)" according to the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic on 13 May 2021.	-

Source: Authors' compilation from various publicly available sources.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Authors would like to thank M. Rifqi Daneswara for his assistance in compiling the data.