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**Dulyapak Preecharush**

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comfort stations, which were intertwined with historical, international, and structural relations. In this light, scholars and students of Asian history, women's history, gender studies, international relations, and memory activism would find much of interest in this book. The book would also attract a wider readership with its accessibility through the provision of relevant background in text and footnotes. Without a doubt, this book is a significant contribution to the memory scholarship in Asian history, successfully demonstrating the extent of complexity and tensions in the past and present of comfort women issues.

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## *Burmese Haze: US Policy and Myanmar's Opening—and Closing*

ERIN MURPHY

Ann Arbor: Association of Asian Studies, 2022.

The United States has diverse national interests and poses strategic threats in several Asian states, with significant diplomatic, economic, security, and geopolitical implications. China's rising power challenges the United States' status quo in multiple arenas and spheres, ranging from friction with Taiwan to strategic competition in the South China Sea and the broader Indo-Pacific space. Meanwhile, North Korea has expanded its nuclear capabilities as a disruptive player in Asian security systems and is dubbed a rogue state by hawkish American policy planners and others.

Myanmar has become a battlefield of great power rivalries due to its geopolitical location linking Southeast Asia, South Asia, East Asia, and the Indian Ocean. It is, and will continue to be, a conflict zone. Much of its peripheral highlands are still under the de facto control of ethnic armed organizations. Under the rule of the military junta, Myanmar was considered a pariah state accord-

ing to the condemnatory rhetoric of American policymakers.

US foreign policy on Myanmar has several intriguing aspects; it was termed a “boutique issue” during the 2008 US presidential campaign, according to David I. Steinberg (2010). Myanmar’s political problem, Steinberg explained, was not a major crisis rivaling other US foreign policy formulation issues, but it has gained increasing attention from American policymaking communities. Over the past three decades, US foreign policy on Myanmar has consistently included anti-junta sanctions, aimed at promoting democracy and human rights. Nevertheless, the Obama administration did not approve of sanctions as the sole effective pressure strategy for Myanmar and called for a policy review. To engage Myanmar in democratic reforms, the administration concluded, it was essential to maintain a flexible approach in addressing obstacles during the country’s political transition away from full military rule. Senator Jim Webb, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asian and Pacific Affairs during the Obama administration, underlined the need for the US to strike a balance between its aspirations to develop Myanmar democracy and its own regional strategic interests.

Covering the above characteristics of the United States’ Myanmar policy, Erin Murphy’s *Burmese Haze: US Policy and Myanmar’s Opening—and Closing* is an outstanding work. It deserves a wide readership among those interested in contemporary Myanmar and US diplomatic approaches in Asia. Policy practitioners and advocates may gain valuable insights from the book, especially into the way Obama administration leaders engaged and interacted with different political stakeholders in transitional Myanmar. Murphy, a former Asian political and foreign policy analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency, spent over a decade working in and around Myanmar, and her expertise is evident.

The book comprises eight chapters, with a prologue and epilogue. Murphy sees Myanmar as unique in many ways: its foreign policy approaches, military affairs, ethnic conflicts, sectarian strife, and democratization. These special issues reflect obstacles and a potential trajectory for US strategy in Asia. The first four chapters focus on humanitarian assistance, national reconciliation, geostrategy, and democratization in Myanmar. Chapter 5 deals thoroughly with the United States’ engagement policy with Myanmar, while the remaining three chapters focus on sanctions, economic investment, and the Rohingya crisis. Although the sources and empirical evidence presented here may be found in the general literature on Myanmar politics and society, in-depth information in the context of the United States’ Asian strategies adds to the book’s usefulness.

In World War II, while Burman nationalist soldiers fought alongside the Japanese army, ethnic minorities launched a counterattack against the Japanese, siding with the Allied forces. The Allied forces included the US military, CIA staff, and Detachment 101 of the Office of Strategic Services, who fought alongside ethnic Kachin, opening a strategic route for General Joseph Stillwell’s forces (p. 19). Under Than Shwe’s military administration, security ties strengthened between Myanmar and North Korea. This proved to be a challenge for US strategy in Asia. Given the Myanmar

military's fear of a US maritime invasion after monitoring regime changes in Iraq and Libya, they signed a memorandum of understanding with North Korea. This encompassed the construction of military facilities and development of strategic missiles, potentially guaranteeing Myanmar's military survival (pp. 33–34).

The heart of the book is Chapter 5, comprising accounts of US engagement with Myanmar during the Obama administration. Murphy offers valuable data about American diplomatic chiefs' trips to Myanmar, both secret and publicized. Derek Mitchell was appointed by President Barack Obama as special envoy to Myanmar. In September 2011, Mitchell and US delegates traveled by US military flight from Bangkok to Naypyidaw. The delegation met with Upper House Speaker Khin Aung Myint, Lower House Speaker Shwe Mann, and parliamentary members from diverse political parties. They exchanged ideas about Myanmar political reform and the Myanmar-US bilateral relationship. The US delegation requested to visit the military parade grounds in the new capital, and surprisingly, Myanmar officials agreed, giving them a guided tour. After meeting with representatives of leading political-legal agencies in Naypyidaw, Mitchell led the team on a visit to Yangon to hear about problems from ethnic groups, civic organizations, political activists, businesspersons, former political prisoners, and, of course, Aung San Suu Kyi (pp. 73–74).

Murphy also offers previously unpublished information about the US Department of State's strategic planning and preparation for the Myanmar visits. From late November to early December 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Myanmar. She met with President Thein Sein, Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin, and parliamentary officials and dined with Aung San Suu Kyi. Clinton's delegation researched and assimilated information from leading publications before and during the Myanmar expedition. These included Steinberg's *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know*, Thant Myint-U's *The River of Lost Footsteps*, Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, Emma Larkin's *No Bad News for the King*, and George Orwell's *Burmese Days*. Clinton met with Thein Sein in the Presidential Palace in Naypyidaw. Thein Sein spoke about significant steps in Myanmar political reform and foreign relations. Overall, the conversation between Thein Sein and Clinton was genuinely substantive (p. 83).

The detailed narrative accounts of leadership interactions during these meetings are the major strength of the book. Murphy discusses the visits by American leaders at critical junctures of the US-Myanmar relationship. Myanmar under the Thein Sein administration underwent major political-economic reform and embarked on a new foreign policy trajectory, distancing itself somewhat from China and engaging more with the US and the West. Meanwhile, the Obama administration's pivot to Asia strategy amounted to a significant shift in US foreign policy orientation. This geopolitical strategy was intended to counter China as a rival superpower by deepening diplomatic ties with East Asian and Southeast Asian states near China. In this context, Myanmar in political transition was a key target for Sino-US competition. However, Murphy believes that the US retained advantages over China by actively working with civil society; building capacity for

local development; providing social space for political actors; and developing essential agriculture, education, water, and health programs at the local level. Ultimately, the US democratic model may contribute to Myanmar's democratic reform (pp. 175–178).

Despite the book's informative data obtained through interviews with American foreign policy community informants, its lack of any foundational theoretical underpinning is a weak point. US foreign relations are determined through complex decision-making processes involving elite groups in the White House, Congress, Department of Defense, National Security Council, and CIA along with Department of State policy planning staff. In international relations, foreign policy analysis (FPA) is the conceptual study of foreign affairs management; it includes foreign policy formulation stages such as goal setting, policy option identification, and formal decision making. Discussions of the power structure behind US foreign policy formation and foreign policy procedure within the FPA framework can improve the quality of academic works on US foreign policy studies—but Murphy's book lacks such a discussion.

Since the early 1980s, engagement has been a frequent, albeit controversial, US foreign policy strategy, as seen in the Reagan administration's constructive engagement policy toward South Africa. Richard N. Haass and Meghan L. O'Sullivan (2000) viewed engagement as a foreign policy strategy dependent on positive incentives to achieve policy objectives. A distinguishing characteristic of US engagement strategies is “reliance on the extension or provision of incentives to shape the behavior of countries with which the US has important disagreement” (Haass and O'Sullivan 2000, 114). The impact of scholarly conclusions in *Burmese Haze* might have been strengthened by a more systematic theoretical analysis of the United States' Myanmar policy.

By comparison, Kenton Clymer's *A Delicate Relationship: The United States and Burma/Myanmar since 1945* (2015) offers a more conceptual diplomatic history, drawing on US, Australian, and British archives as well as the author's interviews with diplomats, politicians, and political activists in Myanmar and the US. Clymer examines how Myanmar fits into the broad pattern of US foreign policy by tracing the history of the bilateral relationship—from the challenges of decolonization after World War II to the United States' strategic anxieties related to the domino theory in Cold War politics and the rise of human rights policies in the 1980s and beyond. He concludes with President Obama's state visits to Myanmar in 2012 and 2014 and the visits to the US by Aung San Suu Kyi and President Thein Sein, which led to a new, warmer relationship between the US and a relatively open Myanmar.

Unlike Clymer's *A Delicate Relationship*, Murphy's *Burmese Haze* does not provide strong analysis with systematic documentary research adding insightful comprehension about the US-Myanmar relationship. Nonetheless, the selling point of *Burmese Haze* is its harmonious combination of compelling stories about contemporary Myanmar and its informative database on the United States' strategic worldview and Myanmar policy format. Murphy's work experience with Asian studies and the United States' Myanmar policy comes through clearly in most of the book's

contents. This helps readers understand the author's purpose and thought, making the book essential reading for policy practitioners, diplomats, and anyone interested in Myanmar politics, foreign policy studies, and Asian international relations.

Overall, *Burmese Haze* is an impressive work that will enable readers to better understand the complex relationship between Myanmar and the United States.

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## *Repossessing Shanland: Myanmar, Thailand, and a Nation-State Deferred*

JANE M. FERGUSON

Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2021.

Since its independence in 1948, Myanmar has not experienced prolonged political stability either with respect to relations between ethnic groups or with respect to civil-military relations. One could argue that the civil war in Myanmar is perhaps the longest running in the world, with democratization never having been established in the country. The causes of ethnic conflict and democratization overlap in several ways. However, both are based on the same assumption: that the Myanmar army is the cause of the conflict, as any authoritarian regime poses an obstacle to peace. In the views of various ethnic groups, fighting against the Myanmar army is unavoidable. The conflict has forced people to join armed groups to fight against the Myanmar army for their own survival. The Shan people are one of the original ethnic groups of Myanmar, and they are familiar with several aspects of the ongoing conflict. This is because they were the leading group who signed the Panglong Agreement and who established the liberation army in the early years after Burma's independence from Britain in 1948. In the intense fighting of 1950 to 1980, Shan nationalists were severely suppressed, which compelled many of them to relocate to border areas. When Shan people crossed the border and settled in Thailand, they hoped to encounter their new home as a friendly state. However, they found themselves needing to assimilate into a challenging