

GREAT DECISIONS DISCUSSION GROUP  
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March 5, 2013

10:15 A. M. – 12:15 P. M.

# Myanmar: Beggar with a Golden Bowl

Topic Leader: Charles Kimball

## AGENDA

### 10:15: Kickoff

- Welcome and Introduction of Guests & New Chapter Members
- Briefing Book Distribution
- Topic Leader Presentation
- Group Discussion

***CHAPTER MOTTO** - "DISCUSSIONS SHOULD BE CONDUCTED WITHOUT  
FONDNESS FOR DISPUTE OR DESIRE FOR VICTORY" – BEN FRANKLIN*

## UPCOMING MEETINGS AND TOPICS

- March 19, 2013 -- **Threat Assessment**  
Topic Leader: Gary Wenglowski
- April 2, 2013 -- **Egypt**  
Topic Leaders: Mike Kornfield and Peter Kuniholm
- April 16, 2013 -- **Iran**  
Topic Leader: Fred Piker
- April 30, 2013 -- **NATO**  
Topic Leader: Tyler Beebe

- May 14, 2013 -- **China in Africa**  
Topic Leader: Joe Adams

## TODAY'S TOPIC

After World War Two, Burma lay heavily damaged. Still, it was rich in natural and human assets:

- agricultural land, with forests of teak and other hardwoods;
- untapped oil and gas resources and generous deposits of gemstones and other minerals;
- a history of trade as a leading exporter of rice to the world;
- a lively and cosmopolitan intellectual life;
- universities that were among the best in the region; and
- one of the most strategically important locations on the map of Southeast Asia.

With the coming of independence, there was brief interlude of promising democratic government and economic resurgence. But, Burma also has a history of violent politics and ethnic strife. Aung San, founded the modern Burmese army and negotiated Burma's independence from the British Empire in 1947; he was assassinated by his rivals in the same year. In 1962, a military coup took the nation in an entirely different direction. Over the next 49 years it became Myanmar, one of the world's most closed, oppressed and impoverished societies.

In 2011, almost inexplicably, things began to change again – from the top down. Without giving up power, the military class that dominates government has begun liberalizing political life, recognizing opposition parties, opening the economy to foreign investment, and reaching out to neighbor states in diplomatic cooperation.

1. What can the US do to insure that Myanmar is a friend, not a foe? Should relations with Myanmar continue to be prioritized, as they seem to have been, relative to US relations with other Asian countries?
2. Sanctions appear to have worked in Myanmar. In view of Myanmar's changes, should they be lifted now?
3. What, if anything, should the US do to promote the protection of minority rights?
4. In what ways does economic development affect the democratization process? For this largely agrarian society are there dangers of too-fast reform?

## **SUGGESTED READINGS**

**Great Decisions 2013 Briefing Book**, Chapter Four, **Myanmar**.  
Available at the Reference Desk, Katonah Village Library.

Thant, Myint U, 'Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of  
Asia'

Wikipedia - Burma