



Beyond the Headlines
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Burma Reborn and Full of Hope

Daniel Obst: On behalf of the Institute of International Education, I'd like to welcome you. My name is Daniel Obst. I am the deputy vice president of international partnerships here at IIE. I'm particularly delighted to hear the talk today from Barbara about Burma. IIE has just this year launched an initiative specifically focused on higher education in Burma. So it's a very timely talk for us. My colleague, Clare Banks, is here somewhere in the room, and our accompanying IIE president, Allan Goodman, is on a delegation in February to Burma. It's a delegation of about ten American universities, and our effort there, really, is to help the American universities identify potential partners, but also really contribute to the capacity building in Myanmar. There's a tremendous amount of need in all kinds of areas, from teacher training, to curriculum development, to setting up international infrastructure to host foreign delegations and so on. So we are very excited about this. Part of our Burma initiative also is a series of bi-national conference calls, focused on higher education collaboration. We just had our most recent conference call with the ambassador of the Myanmar Embassy here in Washington and the deputy assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs. And it was a very interesting talk about, really, what some of the challenges and opportunities are to collaborate with Myanmar. You can hear that—and we recorded that conference call—you can hear that, see it on our website. And then, the final word I'd just like to say is that one of the outcomes we hope to get out of our trip to Burma later in February is actually a real report on what some of the specific needs are, because we can only do so much. Our trip is really a fact-finding mission on seeing what some of the challenges are, but then where others can help and really reform the higher education sector, but also contribute to collaborative exchanges. I just wanted to highlight one resource flyer that I think is outside for you to take. This is something that the State Department prepared on educational exchanges between the United States and Burma. And it's actually a really informative sheet that highlights some of the educational exchange programs and opportunities. Also for faculty members—I know some faculty members are here—the Fulbright Specialist Program with Burma reopened, so there's some great opportunities. But really, we are glad that you're here, Barbara, and I always am happy with our partnership with the Women's Foreign Policy Group. So thank you, Patricia, and over to you.

Patricia Ellis: Well, thank you so much, Daniel, for your very kind hospitality. And we love to be here; we love the partnership, and we appreciate the opportunity to meet here once again. It's kind of become our regular place, and it's very cozy and it's really great for conversation and great partnership.

Before I begin the program, I just wanted to mention—a former board member of the Women's Foreign Policy Group, Catherine O'Neill, passed away recently. Some of you may know her; she was the co-founder of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. She also was very actively involved with the UN. One of the many things she did was she ran the UN office in Washington for a number of years, but spent a lot of time in New York. I just wanted to remember her for a moment, because she really was a very special force, very active, and worked hard on all the issues that we all care so much about. So I just wanted to mention her.

So good afternoon and welcome. I'm Patricia Ellis. I'm president of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. I think we have some new people here today. We promote women's voices and women's leadership on the pressing international issues of the day, such as our very timely topic, Burma Reborn and Full of Hope. We are so pleased to have Barbara Crossette with us today. She is a journalist and author—I'll give a little bit more about her bio, and she will tell you more about her trip to Burma. But she was in Burma in September and she was working on an article on Burma and Southeast Asia for the Foreign Policy Association, *Great Decisions 2013* Briefing Book—here it is! And she said that it has just come out so she can probably tell you, it's an excellent overview, which includes the history, which includes current situations, relations in the region and with the US and other parts of the world, so I highly recommend it. I'm really especially pleased to welcome Barbara back. She was a member of the WFPG Board and she's been a speaker for us on many occasions—always interesting discussions. And, as I mentioned, today she's going to tell us what all these changes in Burma mean, and what the significance is. And I'm sure we will have a very interesting discussion to follow. I'll open with a few questions, and then we'll open it to the audience, and we always leave plenty of time for questions. It's also very fitting to have Barbara for our first event of 2013. So a very happy new year to everyone.

One event I wanted to mention coming up, which is not a discussion, but one of our other very important activities: our mentoring fair, which is taking place in February—February 20th—at NYU. And we sit around at tables divided by different fields and we counsel students, and it is a great way to give back; it's really rewarding. So anyone who might be available and interested in being a mentor, let us know. Everyone who comes gets really excited about it, and they also enjoy meeting the other mentors, so that is really nice.

It's now my privilege and pleasure to introduce Barbara. As you can imagine, I've known her for some time. She is currently UN correspondent for *The Nation*. She has authored many books on Asia. I think many of you know her from her former connection with *The New York Times*; she was a chief correspondent for the *Times* in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and of course she was the UN bureau chief. She also was a diplomatic correspondent in Washington; she reported from Central America, Caribbean, Canada. And she's won a number of awards for her coverage—the Poke Award for her coverage of the assassination in India of Rajiv Gandhi, a Fulbright for promoting better understanding, and, most recently, the Shorenstein Prize from Harvard and Stanford for her writings on Asia to enhance the understanding of the region in the west, which is really important, especially today. Among the many other things she's done, she's written a number of books. I'll just mention two—*India Facing the 21st Century* and one I remember, which is a wonderful book, *So Close To Heaven: the Vanishing Buddhist Kingdoms of the Himalayas*. She's written travel essays. She has written a number of UN reports that relate to women and population. She's taught journalism at Columbia and Princeton. And, related to today's discussion, in 2003—this is way ahead of the time—she led a journalism workshop in Phnom Penh for writers and editors from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Burma. And lastly, right now she is a Senior Fellow at the Ralph Bunche Institute at SUNY's Graduate Center. Please join me in welcoming Barbara Crossette. [Applause.]

Barbara Crossette: Thank you very much. That was my whole biography. [Laughter.] Okay, I'll first talk a little about why I went—and Pat has said it with great precision—but I was banned from the country for about 15 years. I was the Southeast Asian bureau chief from 1984-88 and I went back and forth from Bangkok, where I lived, to Rangoon quite often, or to Burma. I managed to travel around a lot of the country over that period of time. And then, on the 25th anniversary of General Ne Win's rule, I wrote a piece, which my colleague and friend, Joe Lelyveld, put on the front page, which basically said Burma's shuffling past what should've been a milestone in its history. And it was really about the absolute dire, horrible poverty, and a complete dysfunction of a country that was once Southeast Asia's most promising. Well, that got me banned the first time. The second time was—I did another book called *The Great Hill Stations of Asia*, and I wanted to go to Maymyo—which is now called Pyin U Lwin—but, [wanted to go] because it was one of the great British towns in the highlands where people could go when the seasons of malaria and so on affected the tropics. And you know, you have plenty networks in life—I never, there was a Buddhist one from Bhutan—the Burmese of course said no. And

so the Bhutanese ambassador went to the Burmese ambassador here in New York, and said, “we don’t like journalists either. We let her go—she did exactly what she said she’d do and nothing else.” And so I went to see the Burmese ambassador here and he went along with it. He said, “oh reconnaissance,” and he gave me a visa. But he made me sign all kinds of papers. I will not see Aung San Suu Kyi, I will not do this, I will not do that, I will not do something else. I told him if I saw Aung San Suu Kyi, I’d get into bigger trouble with my colleagues than I would be with him. So they gave me a visa.

In 2008, I was invited to come back. You know, things were just a little bit better. I was invited to come back and help someone start a newspaper in Rangoon. And of course, I got turned down for a visa for that. So, this time around, I started applying in May. I got the visa in September, three days before I’d have to cancel all my flights and hotel and everything else. And, once again, on the reconnaissance—it was a very brave act of the ambassador in Washington, Than Shwe, who’s really quite good and gave me lots of ideas about what to see and so on. So I went, in a great hurry. What that meant, of course—I had no idea how bureaucratic the place still is, and how much red tape is involved in everything. And how difficult it can be to see the simplest things—classrooms, things like that. Because, below the surface, everything feels like it’s in place. And it’s not that people are making—it’s not brutality. It’s just functional inability to see any reason why anyone should be doing what you’re asking to do. For example, the ambassador told me to go out into the countryside and see the poor villages, and what the agricultural needs are at that level. A UN affiliated NGO in Rangoon said, basically, “it’s impossible, it takes six weeks to get permission.” To go out on a road to a village! So it’s worse than it was in the 1980’s, in that regard.

Secondly, I wanted to go to the library at the university in Rangoon because someone had set up a meeting with the librarian, who wanted to talk about the shambles that some of the collection had fallen into, and the things that they needed to catch up with the rest of the world. And I was denied entry, not only to the university library, but also to the university campus. I couldn’t even get in on the campus, just to walk around. And I had been doing that with students who, you know, were my sort of unofficial translators and everything 20 years ago—30 years ago. So it’s odd. There’s something kind of digging in—because that’s always what they had to do. And so they’re doing it, so that was what happened.

Now, before we get too far here—the name change in 1989 from Burma to Myanmar—and also Rangoon to Yangon. A lot of you here may have been there recently. It’s a political issue, really. And it was military versus democrat. Aung San Suu Kyi and her people always call it Burma, and always did. And the military reign—I was there in 1997 for this book on the hill stations, and this had taken place in 1989. The military—I mean, there were years of wacky things the military did in Burma, and they would be funny if it weren’t for the toll it took on people. Changing the currency almost overnight to bills that I think you had to divide by 15. I can’t remember what it was. So you have bills for like 15 dollars kyat and 90 kyat, and sort of things that didn’t make sense. And also that meant a lot of people lost the money that they had put away in the old kyat. I heard that they’re still driving on what we would call the American side of the road, with cars with British steering. And so someone said, well one bright morning, they decided we don’t want to be on the left for any reason—you know, people tell stories about [things]—we now drive on the right. But no one had the money or the equipment or anything to change your cars. So, on top of all the other nightmares in Rangoon traffic, you’ll see all these cars driving on the wrong side of the road, basically. It helps a little that they have a lot of one-way streets now, so you can’t come out too badly. And there were others—other things that happened.

But anyway, the name change. I think now, in the last two months, it’s easing into a kind of a dual use. And I always say to people, think of Germany and Deutschland, or Austria and Österreich. Bangkok is Krung Thep if you’re Thai, and Munkai is Thailand. So there are a number of countries where people have their own names for their countries. Myanmar is a historical name, we don’t need to go into how they chose it or why, although some people say—again, anecdotally—it had to do with Burma being related to only one ethnic group. But we all know that that would be, to say the least, window dressing on the ethnic policies. So, I think—except Zimbabwe. I heard someone argue that, we all accepted Zimbabwe, so why not accept Myanmar? I mean, it’s quite simple. Zimbabwe and all of those African

and other post-colonial countries—these are revolutionary democratic names. These are names that meant something.

Now Burma was the name that Aung San, Aung San Suu Kyi's father, used. It was the name of the country during independence, when it was hopefully going to be democratic. And so, to many people, Burma is more important to hold onto. But with the young—a lot of young people, I ask "what do you call the city?" And they say Yangon, they hadn't heard of anything else, a lot of youth in the population. And they were all—they didn't care about Myanmar or Burma. And again, this is partly because they would say, "well Myanmar is an old name." So it's like Mumbai and Bombay, and Calcutta and Kolkata, or whatever. It takes hold. I think that it's really—when President Obama, the State Department—the US government still calls it Burma, officially, and so do the British, BBC, and some other countries. A lot of it in Thailand; it's still called Burma, in the newspapers and so on. Hillary Clinton always calls it this country or whatever. [Laughter.] When President Obama was there, he used the name Myanmar, I think, at least once or twice. And I think it's a little political, but I think I should say it right up front—the feeling among people who have been working very hard, that I talked to.

Frances Zwenig, if you haven't had her at one of your meetings in Washington, she is a councilor to the US-ASEAN Business Council. She's of course, a great promoter of the word Myanmar. But anyway, she was the go-between between me and the ambassador when I was down there begging shamelessly for a visa. She feels, though, well—that this is going to sort itself out. But when the president of Burma was here in the US, and Aung San Suu Kyi was here in the US at the same time, even in New York at the same time, that this was handled very skillfully—though some of these people here may disagree—by Hillary Clinton, by the president, so as not to offend either side. And the spirit of that was certainly carried on by Aung San Suu Kyi and, to some extent, Thein Sein. The president spoke of her in very positive terms in his speech to the UN. She talked about the partnership she had with him. We haven't got time to go there, but this is a relatively new history, and neither of them seems to be totally trusting. But they know that, for Burma, this is what they have to do. And she still calls it Burma, and he calls it Myanmar so, you know.

Burma, I think it's important to know, is not—it's a poor country, but I don't think we would consider it a third world country in any way. And the image that comes to mind when you talk about a third world country, or I think the old phrase used to be "basket case" country. Statistically, it is very poor, especially in its neighborhood. It has the lowest per capita income in Southeast Asia, close to Cambodia. Cambodia is about \$2,000; Burma has, at the moment, \$1,950—give or take—per capita GNP. GDP, sorry. Half the Philippines, about less than a quarter Thailand's per capita income. And life expectancy is low by Southeast Asian standards. 55 million to 60 million people live in this country. It's bigger than France. People don't always think of these things. I find it's the other end of the telescope. The farther away a country is, the littler it looks. [Laughter.] I always hear Bhutan is described as a tiny country, a tiny kingdom. It's bigger than Switzerland, a little bit, but we never call Switzerland tiny.

Maternal mortality is very high. This has to do with the health system, or the lack of it. Infant mortality rate is high by Southeast Asian standards. But, for this country of gorgeous natural resources and human resources, I think among the best things going for them are the Burmese people. And I use the word Burmese to mean everybody in the country. I think they led life, when I was there earlier, life in immense sadness, but also great forbearance. I heard more often this sort of fragile hope and very little bitterness or revenge. The interesting thing is that, and probably among other reasons, everyone knows that is a useless and a suicidal gesture.

Several years ago, at the Asia Society, we had a meeting like this with lots of Karen and other ethnic human rights people who were delivering these terrible indictments of the military. From the years I went to the border camps along the Thai border and, for that matter, the Muslim Arakan States, that was all true. Around the table was the former Chief Justice from Rangoon, or Yangon. I'm not sure how the courts were constructed then, but he was a leading judicial figure. And the American Human Rights group started in on the International Criminal Court, and they're going to be tried for all these things

they did and everything. And he said “wait a minute, we got to get on with restoring the country. They will be taken care of in the afterlife.” And nobody knew what to say. Because it’s a very different sense of how you get even. You get even by making the country what it should be, not by wasting the next 20 years chasing after retribution. Now that may change, because now there’s space, a little space. And so that may be different down the line. There was a lot of isolation. They feel that very keenly. By the way, the reason I went, was because I haven’t been back since the late 90’s and so I wanted to make sure I was up to date on what was happening. And I didn’t go to the new capital, Naypyidaw, I stayed around the Rangoon area, because that’s the area I knew best and I could go back to places I had been before. I talked to students, and I talked to a teacher in the classroom.

Anyway, literacy—I can say a few more things about the Burmese people and then we can answer questions. That 92% literacy in Burma, 92%—and in a country where its education system is worse than shambolic in many places. I did go to one monastery where the chief monk—it was not a novice school, it was an actual school for poor children in the neighborhood. It was in an area where I was before, where in the 1980’s, a woman came out with her little boy dressed up in an undershirt and everything and gave him to me. And she said, “take him with you. He won’t have a future here.” And I tried to explain to her, through an interpreter, that this is impossible. I couldn’t go down to the airport with a four year-old boy. [*Laughter.*] He was a gift.

And another family, we went into their house and they wanted to do something, show something. This was actually down—well, you know, if you live through the trip—down into the delta of the Rangoon River. We went there to a house. And they brought out—she raced around and then she brought out a little tin plate and it had one spoonful of sugar on it. And she put that down in front of me. It was the best that she could do for a guest who just came out of the sky, as far as she’s concerned. But that kind of generosity, and some warmth that—it’s very hard to find in so many other places. No one ever asked me—except for [the woman who] asked me to take the little boy and raise him—for the kind of things that so often people complain about in some other countries, that makes it difficult to empathize.

Anyway, the intellectual payment is a very clear [*Inaudible*]. His family married a professor at Rutgers—told me that he was a student in a lecture at Mandalay University in the early years—I guess the late 60’s. And then showed up to the mainland and took over in 1962. Rangoon—it was among the best universities in Asia. And when I was in Rangoon, someone told me anecdotally, in fact Lee Kuan Yew, that [it] was his idea to be educated was to go to Rangoon University, because that was the place to go in Southeast Asia. That’s the kind of country it was at that time. It’s not so much as you know now.

Gemstones, lots of fertile plants for rice growing, rivers for water and hydropower and very artistic people. And there were a lot of the Buddhist majority, which has its positive side but also creates some problems, which we can talk about if you want—in the case of Arakan. In fact, I went to the Bogyoke Aung San Market in Rangoon, and it was just a thrill just to see what there was for sale and who was buying it. There weren’t any tourists. There were no tourists, not many, not many, there were some but not many. It was Thais [that] were coming in plainly. There was an immense amount of jade. I mean all kinds of, all levels, all designs or whatever. And I said to the UN official in Rangoon when we were meeting later, “I don’t buy this stuff because I’m not a jewelry expert and I don’t know if it’s real or good or, you know, what the quality is.” He said “hey, we have so much jade lying around here. It’s not worth anyone’s while to fake it.” [*Laughter.*]

Well, then the only other thing is, what’s holding it back and we can talk about that after. I’ve mentioned some of the things—that it’s still trying to break down the bureaucracy. Capacity is one question. First of all, there’s no rule of law, useless courts, land ownership by the military still. When I asked the ambassador about that, he also said that this is a very difficult issue. He said, “I suggest you don’t talk about land ownership by law. You go to a village and see what this means.” You don’t know what’s going to happen to your piece of land.

And now there's been the first widespread really strong protest in the area of Saigon—in the northwest—over Chinese and Chinese influences. That was probably one of the things that brought around the change. They don't want to be just a colony of Vietnam, mostly Yunnan province up in the northeast corner. So anyway, their farmers have actually been protesting because this Chinese copper mine wants to take more land, and they're in league with the military. This is what Frances Zwenig would tell you about...

Ellis: There was also the issue with the dams.

Crossette: And the dams, yeah. The president surprised everyone by cancelling that project with the Chinese, but by then, he had served already the Kachin—the independence army—[and it] was already back in the field. And they said, you know, “if this thing goes ahead, there's going to be another war.” And they messed around for a little while, and of course, there's another war now and it's pretty nasty. So they have rioting and they have really good pressure on the Muslims. [*Inaudible.*] They have a Kachin army—they have some break away Kharin and others—but basically, they're trying to build up a sort of sense of the union of Burma, which is what they want to call themselves, the Union of Myanmar now.

It sometimes has some funny political side effects. The other day—I read the Irrawaddy everyday just to make sure I stay up—the Irrawaddy Online, which used to be an exile publication but now has opened an office in the capital—not in the capital, in Rangoon. And they had a picture of Thein Sein, the president, who's rather stone-faced most of the time. He was at a Karen New Year's event. He was wearing some kind of robe that someone must've told him was what the Karen wear, and he's standing among all these other Karen who dress entirely differently, and he's trying very much to look like he's one of them. And I thought, this is the old story about American presidents putting on Indian headgear in order to look like you're one of the people. So, he's actually getting out there and trying but, you know, it's a long way—versus industrial development, the smuggling, the cronyism which carries on, the squandering of the peasants. You trip over generators all over the city—in Rangoon, anyway. In front of everything was little sidewalk clinics, which people go to and pay for because they don't have decent healthcare. The banking system is almost nonexistent. It's coming along now; I hear there's an ATM somewhere in the airport. [*Laughter.*] You can tell how unfunctioning because it can take half a day to try and change money. And the reason is they don't accept [dollars]—they hold them all up, they look at them and they discuss it and all kinds of things. The idea is that—even a 20 dollar bill—that there must be so much—one bank finally told me—so much counterfeit money floating around that nobody trusts you when you come in with dollars, even with an American passport. That kind of a banking problem means that's going to hurt tourism. For credit card holders—now MasterCard and VISA are both working at establishing a presence there. [There is a] dearth of industrial development.

As I said, the lack of basic courts, schools, hospitals—the kind of things that promote the kind of human resource development that the country so much needs, because these people are good at English. They come into the American center—which apparently stayed open for most of the period in Rangoon, which is like an information center beside the American embassy—and they come in there and read books about Burma also, because they can't always get them anywhere else. And they watch videos, and one man, my former teacher told me, learned to speak English watching *Friends*. [*Laughter.*]

They speak good, colonial English. We could sit and talk with high school students. They have an enormous ability at language, and certainly English. Their education system, a lot of it is from Aung San Suu Kyi's book site, which was built by American missionaries coming all over Asia. So they have a kindly attitude toward the Americans now, I think. And I think the big thing is—I'll stop because Pat wants to talk, I'll finish here. I mean not that I don't want to talk, I want *you* to talk. So the biggest problem, I think, with Americans is if the US goes over there interested only in oil and gas, an extraction industry, if all these deals are going to be made—and the Obama administration claims that it has a lot of very serious regulations in place, so that you can keep the cronies from just switching over to American money. But if these things—if this huge promise, which middle-aged people or older people

will say, I know I won't—my life—it's too late but my children, my children. And so, if the US, Americans—and since there are so many people, NGOs, individuals and others—could start going in and making a difference in the smallest classrooms. In fact, this monastery school I went to, where they took poor children from the neighborhood, was pretty much supported by Buddhists from other Asian countries; the Vietnamese, the Thai, and others were helping. And the Germans had built them a clinic, because they really didn't have one. They took little kids in, at the age of three or four, and they could go through. It was just a small group of monks. But it made a difference in a very, very poor neighborhood that hadn't changed a lot since I had been there in the mid-80's for the first time. Just more cars. But, again, a huge interest in reaching out to the United States and talking with people in the United States, and, of course, those who are exiled here and overseas Burmese so...

Ellis: Okay, thanks a lot. There are so many things to ask, but I have some questions to lead off with, and then you all jump in and we'll get to everybody's questions. Okay, so I have questions about the internal neighborhood and also the external. Let's start with the internal and that is, why did this happen at this time? And how strong is the military still? And, in terms of Aung San Suu Kyi, I mean—she's such an icon but, in that part of the world, many times there have been the family dynasties. So I was just wondering, I mean she is a remarkable woman in her own right, but I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the nature of her popularity and all that. And lastly, on the internal, like the whole national unity—there are so many different groups there—how crucial is that?

Crossette: Do you remember—

Ellis: I remember—

Crossette: I want to say one thing, which is that there's a wonderful Thai journalist who is at *The Nation Media*. He used to be the owner of *The Nation* newspaper in Thailand, the leading newspaper in Bangkok. He writes a lot about Burma. He's also on the Irrawaddy website and I've seen good pieces that have appeared in *The Nation* before, and they've been reproducing them. He says even as late as—sorry—as early as 1997, people were getting the hint that the ASEAN meeting, that's the Association for Southeast Asian Nations, to which Burma belongs—and they're going to be the chair of it next year, and [that], the following year, the association is going to try and turn into something like the EU. Nobody has really high hopes right now, but they work firmly enough, you know. He says by 1997, '98, it was already clear that there were people in Burma, and including in the military, who were simply worried that they were going to become a satellite of China. And that they—somebody said to him at an ASEAN meeting, and I think I have this right but I'm not sure, something about we have to look at the other side, didn't say who, what or why. Better American relations would be good because we don't want to fall on the other side. It was a very vague reference but the people who were there got it. Now, they also know that they were so badly isolated, that their development was nonexistent. But there was a huge talk about whether or not sanctions were good. When you have sanctions, you have this argument, just like when you talk about human rights violations, you have the argument. Because what do we do with a country, particularly in Washington, when you have this kind of a problem? Now the sanctions regime, which the US really promoted, was so strong on this country, that even the UN couldn't work the way it wanted to. It was limited to strictly humanitarian, and they had to fight for that. Now, Ban Ki-moon said that, when he went to Burma the first time, against the advice of all human rights groups and everybody else—because the Burmese military remember, you'll remember, didn't want anyone to come and help. People were dying, 180,000. Some people were saying 200,000 people died, and he refused to have the outside help.

The French Foreign Minister then thought, well why don't we sail in our warships and do what we want to do and leave [*Laughter.*] under the responsibilities to protect. It just packed the military into the wall. Ban Ki-moon gave them this lecture, he said, "you sort of have to get with the rest of the world." They were so paranoid, that even if you allow nurses and doctors into the Delta area, after the cyclone hit, that somehow this was a big problem, you know. Then when they allowed the relief to start coming in in small doses and some UN people, it never went back to what it was entirely. In 2010, about two years

later, the Obama administration started what they called an opening—although they have other words for it—but a cautious approach. Because they must have known, from ASEAN members and others, that this country was in trouble, and probably was willing to—I mean they could talk. It's not the Iranian situation. It's not any of those situations, North Korea—although North Korea was a friend of Burma's. So that happened, and then when Ban Ki-moon said, when General Than Shwe, the last really bad general, was in charge and they built a really awful constitution in 2008—when he went and he met the Prime Minister, who was Thein Sein, who is now the president. And he thought he was a much more reasonable man, because General Than Swe was so powerful that Thien was kind of—not shadowed, but he was the other guy. And so, whether he was able to persuade the people—I mean everything about Burma is a mystery, except for the people who make these decisions.

The other thing is that, in 2015 now, they're supposed to have another presidential election and so everyone is jockeying for position. And I think that's a good way to lead in to Aung San Suu Kyi. Everybody told me that she would, hands down, be elected president, if it were a presidential election. She's part heroine, as she deserves, I mean she was extremely brave, and [is] an extremely appealing character. She certainly went down well in the west, and this is a problem because there are serious questions about her political leadership inside Burma. And one is that she has not created out of the National League for Democracy a good functioning political party that's strong enough to mount a strong campaign against the military and not get stacked up in parliament and various other things. The parliamentary speaker has apparently mumbled about running for president. Thein Sein was asked in New York whether she'd be allowed to be president. There's a constitutional bar at the moment, against her being president. She's got her foreign husband, foreign children, or had a foreign husband—he died.

So that's one thing. That's some of the nitty gritty political people, and some of the generation 88ers who are now involved in all kinds of things. You know, they come out and they've been in jail, and they've been treated horribly and sit down and they say, "we went to a meeting, now what can we do to help? You know, not that we're going to go burn down the houses of all the military people but what can we do?" So the feeling is that there is something there. She's Aung Sun's daughter, the founder. He had a peculiar past, but that's okay. He was in the Japanese military at one point, in World War II. But this is common in Southeast Asia. The Japanese were seen as the non-westerners, so you could cheer when the Japanese won something, because ah-ha, Asians can stand up to the west. And it was particularly the colonial British. And so the Second World War, when Japan was fighting Britain and the US over the body of Burma—anyway, he went to Tokyo, and came back. The point is that he tried, on several fronts, to organize a country that would work. He went to London and negotiated an end to colonialism in Burma, separately from India, which was important, so that Burma could stand alone. And at that point, as I said, it had the most promise of any country in Southeast Asia. It had these terrific schools and universities. It had a good legal system. It had all kinds of things. It was the world's largest rice exporter, from time to time. And so it had the possibilities and then, of course, just threw it away.

Now, her big problem now is the ethnic one, I think—again this is on anecdotal evidence—and Buddhist nationalism, Burmese Buddhist nationalism. Because she's Burmese, she's a Buddhist, and she owes a lot to the monks. And I know within the UN there are people who think she's afraid of antagonizing the monks. Now, there have been in Arakan State, over on the Bay of Bengal—they've had these terrifically horrible attacks on Muslims, Muslim Bengalis, some of them who have been there for more than 200 years. Not them personally, but their families. And she was pressed on this, in Washington, when she spoke at the Institute of Peace. And she said, "it's a citizenship issue," which it is, but it's been a citizenship issue because right from the start, the Burmese didn't want these people to be Burmese. They were always called something else, and they even have pejorative words for them. But the Buddhist monks were in the vanguard—again so I hear, I wasn't allowed to go to Rakhine State—they're in the vanguard of attacking these communities. And so she has soft pedaled—where she could be important to say "okay we're all part of this country, we're going to work out our problems another way," she has soft pedaled criticism of Buddhist attacks on Muslims in that area.

When, by comparison, the big protest broke out in the fall over the Chinese land grabbing up in the Northwest part, Sagaing—am I pronouncing that right? They have beautiful silver there, I know that from years ago, I did go shopping. When violence broke out by Burmans, partially, and monks—Buddhist monks—against the government and against the Chinese ownership of this particular mine, she really tore into the government. But she even, in fact, is now chairing a commission. She's got all kinds of things. She's doing work for the UN on HIV AIDS. She's head of the opposition, however how small it is. She's really busy in lots of areas, so she's a constant presence. Her picture is in all the market stalls and everything like that. Aung was [like] her father sometimes, sometimes not. But she took an entirely different tact with when it was Buddhist monks being attacked. And to answer your question, it's not like she's in any way destroyed her reputation; she could never do that because of her enormous charisma, and her great strength during all that period. But there are some questions over her future, and what she's going to be able to do for the country as a whole. And that's reflected inside the country.

At the same time, I'll say yes, she'll definitely be elected president, even if that's still constitutionally impossible and they don't know how that's going to happen, but still. And yet, at the same time, there are the "yes, buts". Now, the difference, I think, is that the danger that the outside world will continue go its own way, that she's the only answer to Burma, to Burma's future. And that, inside Burma, they want more political choice, or they want more leadership, or they want something other than this very charming woman with flowers in her hair. That's not to put her aside, but to run the show for her party, and for a coalition of Democrats who's going to take on, such as may be in 2015. These are the next very, very serious years. The year that they have the chairmanship of the ASEAN Group and then following that, the following year—in fact it starts this year—with the Southeast Asia Games, which is like their local like Olympics—regional. And they have other things too.

Now, they're doing this with a bureaucracy that cannot function, even now. And has no experience in international affairs. In fact, they had this very clumsy list with 6,000 people who were banned. I mean, it is just lunatic. In fact, when the first 2,000 were taken off the list, I went—the president has a website—I went to his homepage and I got the list, and I looked at all 2,000 names to see if they'd taken me off the list. I mean it was bizarre. Whole universities were banned, dead people were banned. It was like in "The Wizard of Oz" when you pull back the curtain, and there's this little guy in the back. And so, you know, they made fools of themselves; the whole thing kind of fell apart. I met a Burmese monk in Thailand who asked me on this trip whether I knew whether his name was on the list. And I said you know, nobody knows. And so they seem to have, unless you're hearing otherwise, this seems to have gone from the public radar at the moment. I guess the list is still on the president's site. I couldn't find my name but that was only 2008. 4,000 other people are still on there.

Ellis: Barbara, just quickly, so we can get to everybody's questions, but I can't leave without asking about the significance of Hillary going, and Obama going, and what the US can do. Because you mention that the Burmese—they're happy and friendly to have the US there, but the Chinese and the Indians are also going in for the same reason—they want the oil and the gas—and they've always had those relationships. And now everybody wants to go in for the resources. So, do they have a different relationship with India than with China—they're not as afraid of them? So what can the US really do? You said they shouldn't just go in for investment in oil and gas, but what was so major when Hillary first went? And Obama—the first American President?

Crossette: And the first trip he made after his re-election. It was pretty astonishing. They let *him* into Rangoon University. [*Laughter.*] They—and it's not just them—I recommended to Pat a book by Thant Myint-U, the grandson of the only other Asian Secretary-General of the United Nations before Ban Ki-moon. He was an advisor to the president in the fall, I don't know if he still is, but he is considered a historian. He wrote this book called *Where China Meets India: Burma and the New Crossroads of Asia*. And for me it was very useful. Particularly on the Yunnan side, to see exactly how much some of this northeastern area had been sinicized. Anyway, the Indians have kind of a bad reputation in Burma, for

some reason. Again, this may have to do with ethnicity. But, beyond all these things, and all that stuff about the rivalries, is the strategic locality of Burma. And this, of course, comes right out of World War II. And also Burma is right there between South Asia and China, and Southeast Asia. And India's biggest concern has often been that the Chinese will get their route through Burma into the Bay of Bengal, avoiding the Malacca Straits and a longer route around Singapore, and that this will pose a direct threat to India. So from the Indian side, the strategic part is very important. The Chinese side—I mean, that's strategic also. When they get into these huge projects, they'll not only build oil pipelines, they'll often build, you know, the port...

Ellis: They're both desperate for more resources to sustain the growth.

Crossette: They are, but I think on the part of India's strategy—it is strategic because India is Northeast of Burma, and the Burmese Northwest, is a myth. They have seven states there that have never considered themselves Indian, to one degree or another, in the Northeast. And they've had lots of problems in that area. So the Indians have plans, perhaps, to connect the Bay of Bengal that would directly go into the Northeast to help development there, and help open it up a little bit, bring it out, and maybe be able to help solve their problems there because there is a lot of ethnic unrest in the Northeast of India. I mean it's just too big a story.

Question: I'm Daniel Kramer and I'm the new Director for the Fulbright US Student Program. We're actually starting a policy program. Our first program is through Burma.

Ellis: Where is that? A public policy program where?

Question: It's funded by the State Department, IIE. I'm going to pass around a brochure. The deadline is February 1st, so if you have any students, former students who might be interested in applying to the program. My question is what advice would you provide to someone going over who has a Masters in Public Policy, two years of experience, and will be providing special assistance to the Burmese government. What would be something that you'd like to offer to them at a pre-departure or orientation? What would be some kinds of tips that you'd be able to give them?

Crossette: Well, you know, you could look at the president's speech; he's given two kind of State of the Union speeches—one last June or July, and he's given another one in December. And then, within the context of what he thinks, he talks about all the good things—anticorruption and so on—and I don't know it depends what department you're involved in. Some ministers are coming out now as Democrats a little bit more, but it's still a military government. So somebody else in the Ministry made the *wild* suggestion that there should be qualifications for jobs. [*Laughter.*] Because until now, it was who you knew, or how you could pull strings, or it was a bigger system of patronage, I don't know the insides of that. I guess you'd have to spend most of your time there just listening and learning because the system is just—there is no system in many places, from what I've been told. I haven't worked with the bureaucracy, except in the visa department. And I don't know—people will say this to draw on the strength the Burmese themselves have, and on their—you know, this entire word culture. But incrementally, I was you know sent down. [*Inaudible.*]

In the cases of the schools—I didn't go in the schools, but I met students. And I said to them “what do you need?” and they said they “teacher training books, things for the classroom.” Things. And so, even just a little bit, like adopting a school—I don't know whether that would be allowed. And that's different from what you're talking about, as a little model program. I'm usually against these because I saw them in the developing world—model programs—because they work in one village, but then you drive five miles out of town and it's gone. Everyone knows Africa very well. The people who establish one kind of small project—this doesn't radiate. But I think there, because the people are so eager and so talented, it would be an interesting kind of thing. But I think it's a lot of learning. I think Broder, which I mention in the bibliography—Broder has done a series of good articles on the functioning of bureaucracy and other things. Jason Szep is the author; I quoted from one or two of them, but there were three or four

really good ones in which he got into ministries or into the Central Bank, or into something like that, and he actually could find out. And it's a lot of learning. I mean teaching them—if you're dealing with bureaucracy, they don't want to learn because it's their job and their rice bowl. And there aren't going to be new people, yet, in place in a lot of these places. Civil service training, I mean, workshops. I've been asked by an NGO that works with the UN Department, [that is] thinking of coming back and doing a workshop on how you report development. For Burmese journalists, just simply—I've done this in Cambodia on another occasion, how you report—by bringing in people from UNFPA and various state departments to talk to journalists. How do you report maternal mortality? How do you report education levels? How to—it's a how to thing. And if you can just lay it out—how to—then you can only step back, I think. Maybe that's—you would have people who are really experts.

Ellis: So Barbara—apropos reporting. Evidently newspapers are allowed to exist now, starting in April, which I guess...

Crossette: Yes, I just heard from one of my students, who's going to start a newspaper.

Question: I'm Barbara Rochman representing New York County Lawyers Association. I'm just wondering if you've heard anything about intents by anybody to do something about reinstating the rule of law, and making the courts and the legal system work.

Question: My name is Evelyn. Could you elaborate on the minorities, Karen and others, because I don't get, as you mentioned, all these human rights...the Karen being sent to Thailand.

Question: Yes, I'm Ellen Gorman. I'm from the Women's City Club of New York and I'm interested in the role of women.

Crossette: The legal system, The International Bar Association in London, has done—I think they have a human rights institute, and they've taken a look at all these things. They have, in the course of learning about the human rights situation and what they can do—they have also factored in where the legal system has been. When I was there, there was a group of lawyers that tried to get together to save the old traditional Thai court building. Because a Chinese man had bought it from somebody—I guess in the military, who knows—and was going to tear it down and put up a hotel. It's a fantastic building. The architecture—for people who are interested in architecture and preservation and restoration, it is a gold mine of ideas. Because there are so many wonderful buildings. A lot of them are brick, so they are standing, but they are in desperate need of salvation. Including some pagodas, you know, everyone knows the Shwedagon Pagoda. It's famous. But there are lots of other pagodas around that are still there. And the feeling among restoration groups and conservationists [is that] now is the time to save them, because they'll be all mowed down by people building luxury flats and hotels. It's one of those on the cliff countries, as far as saving its history. The British built a lot of these things, but the British built them as they did in Malaysia, often with local architectural ideas in mind like the Burma Station in Kuala Lumpur. Some of these are the same. But the climate in Rangoon is so hard on buildings. When you walk past some shambled—they're not falling down yet—but they need help. That's another thing for small groups to do. I'm sure there are people working on this, like the Monuments Trust.

Next, the minorities are a big problem. And this is where Aung San Suu Kyi has sort of let them down. But, all I'll say is her father had established a commission to discuss all of the minority problems—this was way back in the 40's—and he was assassinated, let's see, 6 months before the country got its independence—so he never was really able to put many of these things into place. But he did found the Burmese army, and this is something that she's been able to relate to. Interesting; there's a picture in here of her with the president standing in front of a portrait of her father in the president's residence in Naypyidaw, the new capitol.

The worst of it now is in Arakan State and in Kachin state. In the case of Arakan, it's almost like she let loose this sort of worst side of some of these people; awful things happened. The Bengali Muslims, basically. But, as I said, they came during the British time, most of them after 1824. And it's a very complicated story, but they're in bad shape. That is already the biggest human rights issue in this country. The Kachin Independence Army has always been a real threat, and there are all the drug lords down the side and up in the Northeast, who came and went across the border with Thailand, the Golden Triangle. And then the Shan and the Karen and the Meng. But the Karen had enormous camps in Thailand where people had lived for a very long time. They are the ones who suffered a lot from the kidnapping, the abduction of children who were used as porters to carry heavy equipment, and also as sex slaves. And also the feeling was, among the Karen, that they were spreading HIV. This is another part of the working that no one has really figured out how bad it is yet, from what I could tell. The Karen has made—technically all of them except the Kachin have made some sort of agreement with the government. But I think there are more than 100 ethnicities, and that, people feel, could be the downfall of the democratic process, if the military says hey, the minute you give this to the democrats, all hell breaks loose, all over the place. So nobody knows. And that's why Aung San Suu Kyi could be so important, if she followed her father's footsteps to somehow get the groups together. I asked many people about convening a sort of meeting of ethnic leaders or something. And from Ban Ki-moon down, they said "not now." It is, I think people consider it, the most serious problem Burma faces, and the most serious threat to, if not disintegration, at least to perpetual warfare.

Women, violence against women—I don't know. I'm not sure, but I need to look on the paper for population. I know how hard it is to collect data, because it takes place mostly within families. And so there's a front that builds up that doesn't really give away much. See, I've only known Burmese women just as a reporter over the years. And, you know, when I was at doing the hill stations book, one of them owned a hotel and was running it up in the hill country. There were women in the professions. I always think, I may be too rosy-colored in this but, that Buddhism is as good to women as most religions are ever are. And I've spent a lot of time in Bhutan, which is really not tiny, but it is very underdeveloped in many areas and there is terrible violence, sometimes, in the home. But women are equal. Equal schooling. In general, they can run farms, but then that's the case in many places. They can own property. See property in Burma—the problem is that the military owned it all, and still does. So to break the back of that, we'll see whether or not women are going to get any slice of any productive land. Women can form companies, but again, a lot of this is carried out in a sort of a male image right now. They're looking for people to start small industries. The US has now lifted the ban on almost all Burmese imports to the US, which is a huge help to them, because then little industries can start. But I don't hear anyone talk about women. They're fine in the school. A lot of the people when I was talking to students outside of the schools and universities, were women. Young women.

Ellis: So are there—I guess we're going to have to wrap up, so we'll take a few more questions. Okay, yes.

Question: I'm actually going to be in Sri Lanka and Myanmar, Burma for the next two months. And how, well, social responsibility...I'm looking at development [*Inaudible.*] and actually I'm a lawyer, so I'm wondering what you think the main part [*Inaudible.*] in the institutions in Burma, right now given the hesistance, what part can they play, what is the biggest barrier?

Crossette: The biggest barrier is the military's tentacles in everything. In land ownership, obviously, and they're going to have to be persuaded. But you can deal honestly and transparently in the private sector, or just don't get in. Now, the US has put a lot of emphasis on this—in part because the administration is wary of Congress stepping in at any point and trying to restore sanctions, or something like that. But the paperwork, in fact, the people who are trying to help get investment going into Burma on a smaller scale are very worried that the Burmese—again here's the case where the workshop kind of thing—the Burmese themselves don't know how to start a business, or how to apply, how you can get around the bureaucratic hurdles, and the bribery. So the US has dozens of sort of regulations about transparency. They have a list of people in Burma who you are not allowed to do

business with, who are really awful. As I said, they're very concerned about this—the administration is—because they don't want the whole thing to implode just because there are going to be too many bad experiences, and Americans won't go there. The US-ASEAN Business Council are concerned that it's going to be hard to find a partner in Burma, who hasn't got dirty hands. So that's actually a really important corporate responsibility.

Sri Lanka has much more established systems; terrible government, that's not being reported—well, except there. And it's got strong civil society, organizations. Again, it's a place where the monks, Buddhist monks, were very nationalistic, and were in fact dangerous during a period. [*Inaudible.*] It reminds me of Christians and Muslims in Sri Lanka, in among the Karen and along that area, there are lots of Christians. This doesn't figure in. Correct me if I'm wrong, I visit the Burmese. But all those times I went to Karen camps, and there were a lot of Baptists—dating back I guess to the British times when the missionaries were there—and before in India, there were lots of Christians, and that was long before missionaries were even invented because Christianity drifted to the East. But I never heard them complain—they complained, it was military and political and human rights—but I didn't get the sense that it was an anti-Christian crusade against the Karen. It was against the Karen, I mean, it was a territorial, ethnic thing. And same with the others. I just think the US has just asked the Burmese to join this International Transparency Network that's based in Norway. And they said they will. A lot of people are trying to put pressure on them to sign other things.

The US likes to think, Richard [*Inaudible.*] had a briefing in the summer in Washington in which he said “we think our corporations, if they abide by the rules that we are demanding of them, will be an enormous help to the Burmese, to see that you can do business another way.” And the very fact you can have a professional business class, if you want to call it that, or sector—that isn't tied to the military. Forget the military-industrial complex for a moment. It would be an interesting model to see. You're going at a very interesting time because, I don't think much as started yet. But, you know, this woman I mentioned, Frances Zwenig—she's at the ASEAN US Business Council in Washington. She's a counselor, she's a lawyer. She has been working with the Burmese on all of these things. She knows all this stuff, chapter and verse. She has studied every word in their investment law, which has just finally passed. And she—before this job, she's been with ASEAN for a long time, she's an American. She worked to get the Vietnamese out of the dog house in the 90's. That's how I first met her, when the MIA thing was wild in Washington. She was steadily, steadily, steadily improving relations with Vietnam, so she would be really excellent to talk to.

Ellis: Well, Barbara, thank you so much, I'm sure we all learned a lot and still have many more questions. So this was fascinating. So thank you for sharing your insights. [*Applause.*]