



Myanmar's Military Engages in Serious Human Rights Violations Against Protesters

The military in Myanmar has intensified its brutal crackdown on anti-coup protesters, with security forces being accused of engaging in serious human rights violations against demonstrators. Reports have emerged detailing the indiscriminate use of excessive force and how hundreds of people are currently being detained without proper charge. There have also been widespread accounts of nighttime raids and arrests in residential areas across the country as the military attempts to round up citizens that have expressed opposition to the recent coup. Last week, the United States placed sanctions on officials who orchestrated the February 1st action which deposed Myanmar's elected civilian government. Despite this, the coup leaders have leveled new charges against ousted and detained former State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi in a move aimed at holding her indefinitely without trial and solidifying their grip on power.

In recent days, Myanmar's military junta has tried to harshly suppress the mass demonstrations in resistance to the February 1st coup. Security officials have been given leeway to forcefully counter the protests, and this has been done using various weaponry including slingshots, sticks, water cannon trucks, tear gas, and rubber bullets. In this social media age of organizing and planning, authorities have also attempted to curtail the gatherings by cutting the country's internet access and executing nighttime raids against suspected anti-coup sympathizers. These various methods of intimidation tactics against largely peaceful protesters have been heavily criticized by foreign governments and rights groups, with the former condemning the coup and urging the military to return power to the elected government while the latter estimates that close to 500 citizens have now been unlawfully detained.

After the military seized power in Myanmar back in early February, Suu Kyi and other members of her government were arrested. The junta, led by General Min Aung Hlaing, also prevented the country's recently elected lawmakers from opening a new session of Parliament and claimed that the coup was undertaken because the government failed to properly investigate allegations of fraud in last year's election. However, Myanmar's state election commission has dismissed that argument, stating that there is no evidence to support the contention of electoral fraud.

Put simply, it appears as though the coup leaders have capitalized on aspects of the country's constitution that give the military certain powers and privileges. Myanmar's most recent 2008 constitution, which was implemented during the 50-year military rule from 1962 until 2012, states that the government's executive, legislative, and judicial entities can be handed to the military's commander-in-chief during cases of "national emergency." Additionally, the armed forces have been allowed to maintain and exert a great amount of influence over the country, as evidenced by the fact that they control several key ministries and are allotted a quarter of the seats in parliament.

In defiance of the coup leaders' well-documented human rights violations against the country's population, the protests in Myanmar are still ongoing. These displays of solidarity and resistance against the military junta are likely to continue, and may even escalate further, particularly in the aftermath of the news regarding the seemingly indefinite detention status of deposed leader Suu Kyi.