

SECRETS AND POWER IN MYANMAR: INTELLIGENCE AND THE FALL OF GENERAL KHIN NYUNT. BY ANDREW SELTH. SINGAPORE: ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE, 2019. SOFTCOVER: 248pp.

Military intelligence under military rule has often played a significant role in preserving that regime's longevity, notably undermining opposition movements. Moreover, a military that focuses on internal security tends to strengthen its military intelligence for domestic security affairs, allowing the intelligence unit to exert a significant influence. This is the case with the Myanmar military or *Tatmadaw*. However, the *Tatmadaw* is notorious for its secrecy as the primary operational norm, rather than its intelligence. Andrew Selth, a seasoned Myanmar military and security expert, attempts to shed some light on Myanmar's intelligence world through *Secrets and Power in Myanmar: Intelligence and the Fall of General Khin Nyunt*. Selth does not focus solely on the modus operandi of the intelligence system in Myanmar but also the role of General Khin Nyunt, the former Chief of Military Intelligence (MIS) at the Directorate of Defence Services Intelligence (DDSI) (1983-2004) and the country's former Prime Minister (2003-2004).

In this book, Selth aims to explain the complex world of Myanmar intelligence. Such an attempt sheds some light on the role of intelligence under a military regime. Selth's research shows that military intelligence and the military, in general, do not always walk side by side. In fact, the DDSI represents a different political bloc to the military within the *Tatmadaw*. Furthermore, Selth voices his agreement with David Steinberg's argument that 'there is no tradition in Myanmar of sharing power' (p.65). This means that the rise of Khin Nyunt created a power struggle within the *Tatmadaw*. Likewise, the fall of Khin Nyunt was followed by the purge of his followers. Selth also offers a number of reasons behind Khin Nyunt's banishment (pp. 61-65). One of the reasons was Khin Nyunt's apparent manoeuvre to forge a closer relationship with Aung San Suu Kyi's camp. Nonetheless, it is hard to tell if Khin Nyunt genuinely supported democratization in Myanmar.

Selth's book provides us with valuable insights on the rise and fall of Khin Nyunt, as well as the dynamics of Myanmar's notorious intelligence unit, DDSI. However, the book does not offer a theoretical perspective on the study of authoritarianism or Myanmar's democratization. Some discussion in the book gives a glimpse of how the *Tatmadaw* generals preserve unity and cohesion of the military to keep themselves in power (pp. 57-59). Despite such useful information, *Secrets and Power in Myanmar* has little use in explaining the 2021 coup, which is beyond the book's scope. Moreover, Selth's attempt to cover a wide range of topics related to

Myanmar intelligence, such as the dynamics between DDSI and other military factions, the fall of Khin Nyunt, intelligence operational issues, post-Khin Nyunt development, and even foreign relations, results in a lack of in-depth analysis.

Overall, this book will be helpful for Myanmar watchers and students of Myanmar. The book provides information and insights on important dynamics within the Tatmadaw. The attempt to uncover the hidden world of Myanmar intelligence compensates for the book's lack of theoretical contribution. Such limited theoretical contribution means that *Secrets and Power in Myanmar* has little use in helping us to understand the phenomenon of intelligence under military regimes elsewhere. Despite this, the book will be a valuable addition to area studies, particularly Myanmar studies, and readers who are interested in understanding security issues in the country. In addition, this book can be positioned as one step towards a better understanding of Myanmar's intelligence world and trigger further study on the subject.

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