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Q2(c)

How does the regime change and political crisis in Myanmar threaten regional security and peace?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · India and the UN System

India and the UN System: Role in UN Peace-keeping; demand for Permanent Seat in the Security Council.

Core demand of the question

- Examine how regime change in Myanmar has affected regional security
- Write at 15-mark length. Use the February 2021 military takeover as the turning point

Revision summary

The February 2021 military takeover ended Myanmar's elected government and widened civil war.

Refugees, drugs, and stalled Kaladan and trilateral-highway work hit India and Bangladesh.

China kept infrastructure and political access to the junta.

ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus was not implemented.

Regional security declined because a weak State on several borders became a vacuum, not a buffer.

Introduction

On **1 February 2021** the Myanmar military detained elected leaders and ended the National League for Democracy government. Regime change here means that coup. Regional security in South and South-East Asia has been affected through borders, refugees, arms, and competing great-power access.

Body

The domestic shock that became regional

- Armed conflict spread among the Tatmadaw, People's Defence Forces, and ethnic armed organisations.
- Civilian deaths, destroyed towns, and collapsed services produced displacement inside Myanmar and across borders.
- The Rohingya crisis from 2017 was not resolved; the coup added new refugee and trafficking pressures on Bangladesh, India, and Thailand.

Immediate neighbours

- India faces an unstable frontier with Mizoram, Manipur, and Nagaland, with refugee inflows and a harder environment for the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and for the India-Myanmar-Thailand trilateral highway.
- Cross-border insurgent sanctuaries and the drugs trade of the Golden Triangle become easier when the centre does not hold.

- Bangladesh carries a large Rohingya population with little prospect of safe return.
- China retains pipelines, ports, and political access to the junta, which shifts the regional balance toward Beijing if other States isolate Naypyidaw without an alternative channel.

Regional organisations

- ASEAN adopted a Five-Point Consensus that the junta did not implement. The organisation's non-interference habit limited coercion.
- SAARC and BIMSTEC cannot substitute. Myanmar sits in BIMSTEC, so connectivity plans stall.
- The United Nations Security Council has spoken in statements more than in Chapter VII force, given P5 positions.

Security reading

- For Waltz, a collapsing State is a local power vacuum that neighbours and extra-regional powers fill.
- For Keohane, the failure is also of regional regimes that cannot lock in a transition bargain.
- India's line has been engagement with multiple actors, humanitarian access, and border management, rather than a democracy-export war.

Flow diagram

Feb 2021 coup -> Internal war displacement
Internal war displacement -> India Bangladesh Thailand borders
Internal war displacement -> China access ASEAN stall
India Bangladesh Thailand borders -> Regional insecurity
China access ASEAN stall -> Regional insecurity

Conclusion

The 2021 coup turned Myanmar from a difficult partner into a source of refugees, drugs, stalled connectivity, and greater Chinese leverage. Regional security is worse because ASEAN cannot enforce its own consensus and because South Asian forums were already weak.

Facts & figures

1 February 2021

Myanmar armed forces detained Aung San Suu Kyi and other elected leaders and took state power.

ASEAN Five-Point Consensus

2021 ASEAN plan for dialogue, cessation of violence, and a special envoy; not carried out by the junta.

Kaladan project

India's sea-river-road link from Sittwe toward the North-East; security on the Myanmar side is the operational risk.

Rohingya in Bangladesh

Large refugee population from earlier violence, with return blocked after the coup.

BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal grouping that includes Myanmar; political paralysis in Naypyidaw slows the connectivity agenda.

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