

Burma's Union Parliament Selects New President

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On March 15, 2016, Burma's [Union Parliament selected Htin Kyaw](#), childhood friend and close advisor to Aung San Suu Kyi, to serve as the nation's first President since 1962 who has not served in the military. His selection as President-Elect completes another step in the nation's five-month-long transition from a largely military-controlled government to one led by the National League for Democracy (NLD). In addition, it also marks at least a temporary end to Aung San Suu Kyi's efforts to become Burma's President and may reveal signs of growing tensions between the NLD and the Burmese military.

Htin Kyaw received the support of 360 of the 652 Members of Parliament (MPs), defeating retired Lt. General Myint Swe (who received 213 votes, of which 166 were from military MPs) and Henry Na Thio (who received 79 votes). The 69-year-old President-Elect is expected to be sworn into office on March 30, 2016. Myint Swe and Henry Van Thio will serve as 1st and 2nd Vice President, respectively.

On November 8, 2015, Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in nationwide parliamentary elections (see CRS Insight IN10397, [Burma's Parliamentary Elections](#), by Michael F. Martin) that gave the party a majority of the seats in both chambers of Burma's Union Parliament. In early February 2016, the new MPs took office (see CRS Insight IN10441, [Aung San Suu Kyi's Party Takes Control of Parliament in Burma](#), by Michael F. Martin) replacing a parliament controlled by outgoing President Thein Sein's pro-military Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). On March 11, the Union Parliament chose the three candidates for President and Vice President.

Following the parliamentary elections, Aung San Suu Kyi met with Commander-in-Chief Min Aung Hlaing three times, reportedly to negotiate a deal to suspend or amend a provision in Burma's 2008 constitution that prevents her serving as President. Following the third meeting, the [NLD moved forward the date for selecting candidates for President](#) from March 17 to March 10, a decision that may have indicated that Aung San Suu Kyi had given up her effort to be selected as President at this time.

Burma's President-Elect

Htin Kyaw, 69, is a NLD member and reportedly a trusted childhood friend of Aung San Suu Kyi. His father-in-law, U Lwin, was a co-founder of the NLD; his wife, Su Su Lwin, is a Member of Parliament. He has a Master's degree in economics from Rangoon University and studied computer science at the University of London. Htin Kyaw is reportedly of mixed Bamar-Mon heritage. He also is a senior executive with Aung San Suu Kyi's charity, the Daw Khin Kyi Foundation. He has never served in the Burmese military.

Burma's Two Vice Presidents-Elect

Myint Swe, 65, who was chosen a candidate by the military MPs on March 11, was a career Army officer and is considered a close associate to retired Senior General Than Shwe, the leader of Burma's last military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC). Myint Swe reportedly played a central role in the January 2012 ouster of SPDC Prime Minister General Khin Nyunt. Khin Nyunt was succeeded by General Thein Sein as the SPDC's Prime Minister. Myint Swe is on the U.S. Department of the Treasury's [Specially Designated Nationals \(SDN\) list](#) of persons subject to certain economic sanctions. He is also presumably on the State Department's list of Burmese nationals not to be granted a visa to enter the United States.

Henry Van Thio, 57, who was the candidate chosen by the upper house of the Union Parliament, is an ethnic Chin and was a major in the Burmese Army. A long-standing NLD member, he was elected to the upper house in the Chin State's 3rd constituency. Henry Van Thio's selection surprised some observers, who had [speculated that someone from the Shan ethnic minority would be chosen](#).

Next Steps in the Transition

With a President-Elect chosen, the next step in the transition process will be formation of President Htin Kyaw's cabinet. [Htin Kyaw has proposed to the Union Parliament to reduce the number of ministries from 36 to 21](#). Media sources indicate that the [NLD will nominate some ethnic minority candidates](#) to the cabinet to foster ties with Burma's ethnic minorities. President-Elect Htin Kyaw also is expected to nominate candidates for chief ministers to Burma's 14 subnational Regions and States. One Burmese media organization has indicated that the [ministerial candidates may be announced as soon as March 21](#). All the candidates are subject to confirmation by the Union Parliament.

Trouble Ahead with the Military?

The military MPs' [selection of Myint Swe reportedly surprised the NLD](#) and may indicate that the Burmese military intend to resist further political reforms. [Myint Swe has been portrayed by some media as an anti-reform hardliner](#) who will seek to preserve the military's role in Burma's government. Prior to the nomination of Myint Swe as a presidential candidate, other signs of tensions between the NLD and the Burmese military had emerged. Members of President Thein Sein's [cabinet have refused to respond to questions from the NLD-led Union Parliament](#), claiming that they are not responsible to the new Union Parliament. On February 26, all 110 [military MPs in the lower house stood up](#) in unison to protest an NLD MP raising questions on the floor about the transfer of land and property to the military authorized by President Thein Sein's government. In addition, the Burmese military have shown no signs of easing up their military attacks on ethnic armed groups in Kachin, Rakhine and Shan States.

Implications for U.S. Relations

The continued gradual transition from a military-dominated to a civilian-led government in Burma is largely consistent with U.S. policy goals and an encouraging sign of the potential for positive changes in the future. The Burmese military's apparent lack of cooperation with the NLD-led government on some matters may indicate that progress is not assured and may not be easy to obtain.