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25 February 2008

MMR102757.E

Myanmar (Burma): Whether the military intelligence force in Myanmar has been fully or partially disbanded and who is carrying out their duties (2004 - February 2008)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In 2004, the head of the military government in Myanmar (Burma) abolished the National Intelligence Bureau (NIB), an "umbrella organization of intelligence departments" (BBC 22 Oct. 2004). Also in 2004, Khin Nyunt, who headed the NIB in Myanmar (Burma) (BBC 22 Oct. 2004) was reportedly "forced out of the ruling junta" (*Nations of the World* 2007, 1065; *PHW* 2007, 854). As well as being chief of military intelligence, Nyunt was also prime minister, a position that placed him third in the political hierarchy of Myanmar (Burma) (BBC 19 Oct. 2004). The official reason for Nyunt's departure from government was that he was "permitted to retire for health reasons" (*ibid.*).

Nations of the World indicates that most observers believe these official statements were meant to mask the real reason for Nyunt's departure, which was viewed as the result of a power struggle between hard-line military chief Than Shwe and Nyunt, who is, "in strictly relative terms," more progressive (2007, 1065; see also BBC 19 Oct. 2004).

The military junta, or State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), abolished the NIB immediately after Nyunt's departure in 2004 (BBC 22 Oct. 2004; Xinhua News 22 Oct. 2004). Shwe reportedly explained this move by saying that the NIB was no longer in the best interests of the people of Myanmar (Burma) (Xinhua News 22 Oct. 2004; BBC 22 Oct. 2004).

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reports that "scores of other military intelligence officials" were arrested after Nyunt left (19 Oct. 2004). Europa World Online likewise reports that "many" military intelligence officers were arrested; in particular, three senior NIB staff members were imprisoned and twelve senior officials dismissed (2007). Several of Nyunt's associates and family members were also arrested (Europa World Online 2007). Moreover, Voice of America (VOA) reports that 2,000 members of the military intelligence unit, which had approximately 10,000 members, were either fired or transferred subsequent to Nyunt's departure (19 Dec. 2004). *Political Handbook of the World* (*PHW*) describes the SPDC's actions as a "purge of the military intelligence apparatus" (2007, 854).

According to BBC News, the NIB previously comprised the following sub-organizations: the Military Intelligence Service, the police force's Special Branch, the Bureau of Special Investigation and the Criminal Investigation Department (22 Oct. 2004).

With respect to which organizations are responsible for military intelligence in Myanmar (Burma), a former political prisoner from Myanmar (Burma), who is also a former student leader from the country, provided information to the Research Directorate in a 12 February 2008 telephone interview. He stated that although the NIB was abolished, the specific units that fell under this umbrella organization still exist (Former Political Prisoner 12 Feb. 2008). Instead of all reporting to the NIB, they report to various government agencies

(ibid.). The Former Political Prisoner explained the work of the various units responsible for military intelligence in correspondence received on 7 February 2008 and in the 12 February 2008 interview, as outlined in the following paragraphs.

Military Security Affairs (formerly known as the Military Intelligence Service) handles the most serious political issues and issues related to "ethnic cease-fire groups" (Former Political Prisoner 7 Feb. 2008), which are "insurgent" groups with whom the military regime has arranged ceasefires (PHW 2007, 856). Military Security Affairs is now part of Myanmar's armed forces (Former Political Prisoner 12 Feb. 2008).

The police force's Special Branch handles cases involving leading dissidents, including members of the National League for Democracy (NLD), Members of Parliament (MPs) from the NLD and from ethnic parties, and members of 88 Generation Students group (ibid. 7 Feb. 2008). The Special Branch reports to Myanmar's police force (ibid. 12 Feb. 2008), which is part of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Myanmar n.d.).

The Bureau of Special Investigation (BSI) addresses financial crimes, including cases involving inappropriate trading, tax evasion and the corruption of government officers (Former Political Prisoner 7 Feb. 2008). It reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs (ibid. 12 Feb. 2008).

The Criminal Investigation Department handles crimes such as murders or rapes (ibid. 12 Feb. 2008). The department is part of Myanmar's Police Force (Myanmar n.d.).

In addition, the Former Political Prisoner stated that the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) has local intelligence branches which monitor the general population in various neighbourhoods across the country (7 Feb. 2008). He added that the Ministry of Information also has an intelligence branch, comprised of pro-regime journalists who monitor journalists, bloggers and Internet users (Former Political Prisoner 7 Feb. 2008).

Further information on the units responsible for military intelligence could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Representatives from the Irish Centre for Human Rights, *The Irrawaddy*, and the Open Society Institute (OSI) and were unable to respond to requests for information within the time constraints of this Response.

Internet sites, including: All Burma Students Democratic Front (ABSDF), Amnesty International (AI), Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Democratic Voice of Burma (DVB), Freedom House, International Labour Organization (ILO), *The Irrawaddy*, Mizzima News, Radio Free Asia, United States (US) Campaign for Burma.

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