

**CHINA'S RESPONSE TO MYANMAR'S
POLITICAL TRANSITION: TOWARDS
A NEW NORMAL**

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EAI Background Brief No. 1175

Date of Publication: 29 September 2016

Executive Summary

1. China's response to the 2015 elections in Myanmar was largely consistent with its policy that has been adjusted since 2011. China is apparently trying to put right a popular view that its past assistance to Myanmar was to back the military junta while resisting democratic opposition.
2. Beijing's resentment towards Thein Sein's pro-western policy since 2011 had been further aggravated by the 2015 bomb incident which provoked public outrage towards the Thein Sein government. Despite the pressure from China calling for a ceasefire, conflict resolution in Kokang area along China's border has not achieved significant progress.
3. Since 2011, China has gradually accepted the fact that a more liberal Myanmar with pluralised diplomatic ties with the West may not necessarily sabotage China's fundamental interests; the strategic significance of Myanmar to China has not tremendously diminished, despite the disappearing privileges that China had enjoyed in trade, investment and aid, among others.
4. The cooling bilateral relations as a result of the suspension of the Myitsone Dam project in 2011 has forced China to adjust its policy and build better relationships with Myanmar's democratic opposition and civil society groups.
5. On China's invitation, Aung San Suu Kyi as the chairperson of National League for Democracy (NLD) visited China for the first time from 10 to 14 June 2015, establishing channels for party-to-party dialogue ahead of the general elections in November 2015. Shortly after the new government took office on 1 April 2016, China's Wang Yi was the first foreign minister invited by Suu Kyi to visit Myanmar.
6. Suu Kyi is apparently aware that her party's supporters are still suspicious of the Myitsone Dam project. At least in the short term, she is likely to stand by her

current position and make decisions based on public opinion in spite of Wang Yi's expression of China's eagerness to arrive at a resolution on the issue.

7. Most Chinese influential experts on Myanmar agree that a democratised Myanmar is not necessarily a fundamental failure or threat to China; they believed that Myanmar's democratic elites regard China as not only an indispensable partner, but also helpful to ensuring Myanmar's economic modernisation and solving its interethnic conflicts in the long run.
8. Opinions on post-election China-Myanmar relations as reported on Chinese mainstream media are generally optimistic. After 2014, with emerging political certainty of Myanmar's democratic future, Chinese industry players have been increasingly positive about China-Myanmar economic cooperation.