

down. In a society where the feet are considered low, this was a clever and powerful attack on the government. And in 1977, when the government sought to justify its authoritarian rule through an emphasis on law and order, a censored press reacted by highlighting every crime story it could seek out. Of course, the press, or at least some papers, also served the state in each of these periods. Thus, as Thitinan seems to find in his chapter, the situation is much more complex than his argument. Indeed, even after 1992, when he believes the media began to play more of a watchdog role, Thitinan indicates that bribery of individual journalists by politicians, in effect buying a media "servant", has been a problem (p. 228). What seems to have changed most, in fact, is the way politicians influence the press. In the past, leading politicians often owned newspapers. Now they are more likely to seek to influence individual reporters and columnists. Thitinan ends by concluding more simply, and more convincingly, that when the opposition is weak, the media can play a powerful oppositional role.

There are a number of other excellent chapters in this book, and indeed all of the chapters raise interesting and important issues for consideration. Those interested in following up the arguments, however, will find a major flaw in the bibliography. The Thai language sources are translated into English without a transliteration. This makes it very difficult to locate original sources. Providing transliteration and translation is standard practice. Despite this bibliographical flaw, this excellent collection of essays will be of great use to those attempting to understand the development of civil society in Thailand.

Jim Ockey  
*Canterbury University*  
*New Zealand*

***Transforming the Tatmadaw: The Burmese Armed Forces Since 1998.* By Andrew Selth.** Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence, No. 113. Canberra: Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, The Australian National University, 1996. 202 pp.

Ever since Myanmar (then known as Burma) closed its doors to the outside world in the early 1960s, there had been a dearth of published material on all aspects of the country's economy, state and society. Even after the ruling military junta decided to open up the economy to foreign investment and tourism in late 1988, academic publications on

Myanmar remained a minority in comparison with those devoted to other Southeast Asian countries. The field has been, more or less, dominated by accounts given by opponents of the regime and those of the government itself. In this context, it is pleasantly refreshing to come across a monograph empirically grounded “entirely on open sources” and professed to have “no official status or endorsement” (author’s acknowledgement), yet comprehensive and objective on the most exotic of all topics pertaining to Myanmar, that is, its armed forces.

Andrew Selth is to be congratulated for his painstaking work on this elusive subject that requires assembling widely scattered pieces of information into a complete jigsaw puzzle. Perhaps, it does help that he is a quiet but thorough “Myanmar watcher” who has been following political and security trends in Myanmar for the last two decades or so and has written extensively about them in defence-related publications. Backed by field trips to Southeast Asia and the United States, which included an opportunity to visit Myanmar and meet members of Myanmar’s defence community, his endeavour has produced a study that will be invaluable not only to those interested in Myanmar *per se* but also to students of defence and security in the Southeast Asian region.

The monograph is divided into eight chapters and six appendices, with the latter constituting a useful collation of information from disparate sources. There is also a select bibliography listing major references, while numerous snippets of information used are represented only by the titles of newspapers and periodicals in which they presumably appeared. This is understandable, given the nature and volume of data involved.

After a brief introduction explaining the difficulties associated with such a study and laying out the aims and objectives of the monograph, the author, in the second chapter, gives an account of the organizational structure of the Myanmar armed forces, known locally as the *Tatmadaw*, and the resources available to it for its development into a modern armed force geared towards conventional rather than counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. This chapter provides the setting for the exposition on the three services (army, air force and navy) in the following three chapters.

In Chapter 2, on the issue of weapons imports, the author consistently uses data provided by the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) though cautioning that their usefulness lies in indicating broad trends rather than detailed accounting (p. 28). Nevertheless, one wishes that such data could be somewhat reconciled with Myanmar’s defence expenditures. Apparently, apart from annual budgetary allocations, Myanmar governments of the day hardly divulged

any information on defence expenditures, making the task excruciatingly difficult for the analyst to correlate them with arms acquisitions. The fact that Myanmar's order of battle is never publicized makes the matching of weapons acquisitions with arms imports and defence spending a well-nigh impossible endeavour. In the same chapter, the section on the indigenous arms industry is very informative, especially the author's observations on new types of light weapons being developed.

The three chapters that follow suggest that Myanmar in the 1990s has been trying, within its own limited capacity, to modernize its armed forces, mainly through the acquisition of weapons that are more in line with a conventional force posture, as opposed to the past practice of a COIN posture. Embargoed by the West, Myanmar apparently could not help but turn to more amenable suppliers, such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), Poland, Yugoslavia, Pakistan, Russia, and Singapore, among others.

The chapter on exotic weapons (Chapter 6) is also a useful commentary on the speculative debate about the alleged fielding of biological and chemical weapons in the war against ethnic insurgents. Despite Selth's conclusion that "the available evidence of ... development, or use, of exotic weapons is still too thin to permit any firm judgements" (p. 126), he expresses some ambivalence towards the possibility of future developments in that direction (*ibid.*).

The author's most valuable contribution to the study of the Myanmar armed forces may be found in the penultimate chapter (Chapter 7), where he succinctly spells out the political and security imperatives influencing the military's perception on its role in building as well as safeguarding the nation-state.

The final chapter is essentially a recapitulation of the observations and arguments outlined in the preceding chapters, and provides a realistic assessment of the capabilities of the "transformed *Tatmadaw*" giving a well-balanced view in contrast to the shrill voices of alarm over such a transformation raised by those with vested interests.

All in all, despite the difficulties and limitations imposed by the opaque nature of the subject matter and the sensitivities involved, the author has done an admirable job in producing an objective account of the Myanmar armed forces' attempt to transform itself into a more modern and capable force. It is a valuable addition to the literature not only in terms of a better understanding of this important Myanmar institution but also in the context of regional security in Southeast Asia.

Tin Maung Maung Than  
*Institute of Southeast Asian Studies*  
*Singapore*