



Burma's Saffron Revolution

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Madam Chairman, Ranking Member Murkowski, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify about the ongoing crisis in Burma and our efforts to help bring democracy to that country and an end to 40-plus years of repressive military rule. We have all seen the gripping photos of saffron-robed monks and brave civilians taking peacefully to the streets in the thousands to press the case for dialogue and democracy, only to be met with the blunt end of baton sticks, clouds of tear gas, automatic weapons, mass arrests, and worse.

The exact numbers of casualties suffered over the past several days in Burma is not clear and, unfortunately, may never be known. The regime admits to only ten deaths. The true number of fatalities is likely many times that number. We have also seen troubling pictures on the aftermath of the regimes raids on monasteries and homes of activists. We know that those random raids have continued. Our Embassy reports that hundreds of people or more have been arrested, and we believe that they are being kept in unimaginably inhumane conditions. The regime's violent crackdown this past week on peaceful dissent by its own people is an outrage, and something we and the international community cannot and will not accept.

Vigorous U.S. and International Community Response

In reaction to the regime's brutal crackdown, the international community has responded with a crescendo of outrage, revulsion, and calls for the Junta to halt the violence and begin a true dialogue with Burma's democratic opposition. Our efforts have focused on ensuring that this outrage channels into greater pressure on the regime to change. President Bush and Secretary Rice have led the charge, forcefully raising the issue at APEC in Sydney, the UN General Assembly, in public statements, and with leaders and senior officials from key governments in the region, including China, India, Japan, and countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (or ASEAN). The First Lady's continued attention to the tragedy in Burma has also helped to keep the issue squarely in the public eye, as have resolutions and letters from Members in both the Senate and House.

The U.S. has also backed up its words with actions that will serve to ratchet up pressure on the regime. Last week, the Department of the Treasury designated 14 senior regime officials under Executive Order 13310, which authorizes the blocking of assets in U.S. jurisdiction belonging to senior officials and other designated persons. The Department of State also identified senior regime officials and their immediate family members – over 200 individuals – as subject to the Presidential Proclamation that suspends the entry into the United States of persons who formulate, implement, or benefit from policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy. We are now exploring follow-up measures targeting the regime and those who provide financial support to it.

At the same time, as the President made clear in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly on September 25, that although we will tighten sanctions, we also will "continue to support the efforts of humanitarian groups working to alleviate suffering in Burma." The State Department is seeking ways to increase humanitarian assistance and support for the movement to restore democracy in Burma.

The United States, of course, has not been alone in this endeavor. The British, French, and other like-minded partners, in close coordination with us, have been equally forceful in their condemnation of the regime's actions and have pressed for strong measures. The EU warned the regime on September 25 that it would reinforce and strengthen existing sanctions if the junta resorted to violence against unarmed and peaceful protestors and we understand that it is now considering such actions. And on September 27, the Government of Australia announced its intention to implement targeted financial sanctions against regime figures and supporters. Perhaps even more significant, however, has been the unprecedented statement by ASEAN Foreign Ministers last week in New York directly criticizing the regime and calling for restraint and urging the kinds of political reforms we have been seeking. It is clear that ASEAN's patience with Burma has worn very thin and last week's sharp words for the regime indicate the organization will no longer automatically circle the wagons and protect a member whose behavior has gone beyond all acceptable norms. We will continue to engage with ASEAN and its individual members to ensure that pressure on the regime from this influential regional body is sustained.

While many countries and regional organizations, like ASEAN, have stepped-up and spoken out against the regime and the crackdown, some key players in the region have been hesitant to do so. Japan is one of those countries. We appreciate Japan's recent public calls for restraint and indications that it may be considering some form of sanctions. We also welcome the visit to Burma this week of Deputy Foreign Minister Yabunaka, who we understand will deliver a tough message to the regime, while seeking answers from the generals on the killing of a Japanese photo-journalist last week. But Japan, we think, can do more. We would encourage Tokyo to look closely at its assistance programs to see what kind of leverage can be applied there. We appreciate Foreign Minister Komura's statement October 3 that Japan will look closely at its economic assistance with a view to further narrowing that assistance.

India is another country that can do more. In an improvement of its traditional policy of not interfering in the internal affairs or publicly criticizing Burma, India on October 2 called upon the Burmese military to investigate incidents of excessive use of force against pro-democracy protestors. This action follows Foreign Minister Mukherjee's public statement last week calling for restraint by Burmese authorities in dealing with the demonstrators. While we are aware of India's strategic and commercial interests in Burma, we believe they should not inhibit India's ability to forcefully advocate, both publicly and privately, for the regime to end to the violence and initiate a genuine dialogue with the democratic opposition. India's voice on this subject, at this time, is critical.

Finally, China is the one country that everyone believes has the most influence on the regime and its policies. While we have indications that Beijing has been quietly pressing junta leaders to exercise restraint and was helpful in securing meetings for UN Special Envoy Gambari this week with Aung San Suu Kyi and the top generals, we think China can and must do more, much more. We have no illusions that China has the promotion of democracy and human rights at the top of or even on its bilateral agenda with Burma. However, we do know that China is concerned with ensuring its neighbor's stability and prosperity. Last week's events have illustrated again that the Burmese regime's rule has no legitimacy and popular support, and that absent a genuine dialogue with the democratic opposition its "road-map" process for political transition is a charade and a dead-end for both democracy and stability. We will continue to press Beijing to do more to promote national reconciliation in Burma based on dialogue between the regime and the democratic opposition and ethnic minority groups. We will encourage China to step up to the challenge in a way commensurate with its emerging status as a global power. If it does not, then China will continue to be an appropriate target for growing international criticism.

The UN, Gambari and the Security Council

The other pillar of our strategy to pressure the regime to affect genuine democratic reforms remains the United Nations. We fully endorse and support the mission of UN Burma Special Advisor Gambari, who was just in Burma this week. We are still awaiting word on the results of his visit and his discussions with senior General Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi, with whom he met twice. Our hope is that Mr. Gambari has been able to catalyze a dialogue between the generals and the leaders of the pro-democracy movement, but that remains to be seen. We also are fully committed to having Burma remain an active issue for the Security Council. We expect Mr. Gambari to brief the Security Council in a formal session shortly after his return from Burma to report on the results of his discussions and next steps for his good offices

mission. Based on Mr. Gambari's report, and in consultations with our partners, we will decide what additional actions/measures to take up in the Security Council in the coming days. While we welcome the Human Rights Council's passage of a resolution on Burma, this is no way substitutes for continued Security Council engagement.

A Way Forward

Madame Chairman, I would be less than truthful if I told you that there is an easy solution to solving Burma's political problems and putting it on a path to genuine democracy. If it were easy, it would have been resolved years ago.

The truth is that the primary obstacle to democratic change in Burma is a 400,000 strong military that has been entrenched in power for over 46 years. The military's officer corps finds it virtually inconceivable that they should surrender the commanding heights of power and governance to a democratic opposition composed of civilians. The regime has propagated the myth that the military is the only institution in Burma that can hold the country together and resist the forces of separatism from the ethnic border areas. The Burmese military has forcefully insinuated itself over four decades into every fiber of the country and runs a parallel economic system that sustains it while impoverishing the rest of Burma. One pundit recently described Burma not as a "country with a military," but rather as a "military with a country."

Recognizing this reality, that change will not come easily, our approach to Burma over the past couple of years has focused on building maximum international pressure on the regime to engage in a dialogue with the democratic opposition, led by Aung Sang Suu Kyi, and the ethnic minority groups, leading to a genuine political transition from military rule to civilian-led democracy. This is what Aung Sang Suu Kyi and Burmese democracy activists, both within Burma and without, have said they want. They do not want the regime's "road-map" process as constructed; that is a dead-end, as long as it does not involve the opposition in a genuine and open dialogue.

The brutal crackdown by the regime, first on democracy activists then on the monks and average citizens who bravely followed them into the streets, was outrageous and clearly a setback for the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people and our efforts to support those aspirations. That said, I can assure you that the Administration remains committed at the highest levels to ensure that democracy is realized in Burma. We will intensify our bilateral actions to pressure the regime. We will continue to actively engage the key regional partners (e.g., China, India, Japan, ASEAN) and employ all appropriate measures to gain their support in pressing the regime for a democratic transition. We will continue to coordinate closely with like-minded partners in Europe and elsewhere in this endeavor. We will actively support Mr. Gambari's good offices mission to promote dialogue and national reconciliation and urge others to do the same. We will also press for appropriate actions by the UN Security Council to help bring about the kind of changes we and the Burmese people seek.

Madame Chairman, while the immediate prospects for progress in Burma may look dim given events last week, we believe that through perseverance and concerted effort with our partners and others, we can help bring a better, democratic future to Burma and its people.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. I am pleased to answer your questions.

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