



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on August 20, 2009

## Myanmar Asks for End to Sanctions

Commentary from Myanmar's military junta appearing in three official newspapers on August 20 proposed that western nations end their economic sanctions of the Southeast Asian nation. The sanctions were levied in response to the many reported human rights violations committed by the regime in the nation also known as Burma.

"The more anti-government groups exercise economic sanctions as a means to put pressure on the government, the further the goal of democracy aspired by the people will divert from its route," Reuters quote the newspapers.



The report urged "all political forces to give up the tactic of economic sanctions and collectively open the golden door to a modern, developed and peaceful democratic nation."

The statements obviously were unabashed propaganda supporting the oppressive military regime that has a stranglehold on Myanmar. The term "anti-government groups" refers to those governments, such as the United States and the EU, that have imposed economic sanctions. And using the word "government" to describe a junta that threw out the results of the 1990 elections and then kept Aung San Suu Kyi — the winning candidate for prime minister — under house arrest for 14 of the last 20 years seems overly generous.

The statements came just days after U.S. Senator Jim Webb (D.-Va.), became the first U.S. official to speak with the regime's leader, Than Shwe. (See our report: "[Senator Webb's Visit to Myanmar \(Burma\)](#)".)

Webb has been a critic of the sanctions imposed by Congress because, he asserts, that have allowed Beijing to increase "dramatically" its influence in Myanmar.

"The sanctions of the past several years have increased Myanmar's isolation from Western governments and culture," he told reporters at a press conference in Hanoi on August 19. "These are major impediments in allowing the Burmese people the kind of access to the outside world that is essential to their economic and political growth."

While in Myanmar, Webb secured the release of U.S. citizen John Yettaw, who had been sentenced the previous week to seven years hard labor for making an unauthorized visit to the lakeside home of Burmese political opposition leader Suu Kyi.

An AP report noted that Webb, who is a leading political advocates of changing U.S. policy vis-à-vis Myanmar, freely acknowledged that he is not optimistic that Suu Kyi will soon be freed.

He did say, however, that he is "hopeful that, over time, the government of Myanmar will understand that with the scrutiny of the outside world, judging their government very largely on how they are treating Aung San Suu Kyi, that it is to their advantage to allow her to participate in the political process."



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In the meantime, Webb recommended that the United States respond to the “gestures” the Myanmar regime extended to him and to “begin laying a foundation of good will and confidence-building so that we may be able to have a better situation in the future.”

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British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, who has long been a supporter of Suu Kyi, has advocated dealing with the military junta from a position of strength.

“I have always made clear that the United Kingdom would respond positively to any signs of progress on democratic reform...,” Brown said following the junta’s extension of Suu Kyi’s house arrest by another 18 months following the visit from Yettaw. “But with the generals explicitly rejecting that course ... the international community must take action.”

As Myanmar’s regime asked the international community to lift sanctions, officials from the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) met in Jakarta, Indonesia, on August 20 to consider issuing a “joint appeal” for Ms. Suu Kyi’s release from house arrest, said Teuku Faizasyah, spokesman for Indonesia’s foreign ministry.

“From what I remember, this would be the first such joint appeal for amnesty,” Faizasyah told AFP news. “We don’t know what form it will take. It could be in the form of letter to Myanmar, but [ASEAN officials] will have to discuss this.”

AFP quoted Simon Tay, chairman of the Singapore Institute of International Affairs, who said: “[ASEAN] will not expel Myanmar or sanction it – not yet – but they will not sit impassively if the regime continues to act in this manner... If followed up, and the regime does respond, it can signal a diplomatic opening.”

In an opinion piece entitled “[Possible Way Out for Myanmar](#)” in the *Korea Times* for August 20, political analyst Nehginpao Kipgen astutely observed how the Myanmar junta skillfully manipulated the John Yettaw incident to get what it really wanted: continued detention of Suu Kyi and a more human face. Wrote Kipgen:

Yettaw, who the junta used for Suu Kyi’s conviction [which added 18 months to her house arrest], was sentenced to seven years imprisonment on Aug. 11. By releasing him, the junta wants to convey the message of humanity and peace.

Moreover, it is Suu Kyi who the military leaders fear and not Yettaw. Yettaw’s case was manipulated to find a reason to indict Suu Kyi so that she can be barred from participating in the 2010 election.

Kipgen also regards ASEAN as a largely toothless organization without the power to rein in Myanmar or effect better treatment of Suu Kyi and other opponents of the regime. He instead looked to the United States to employ “Both carrot and stick ... in dealing with the recalcitrant military junta.”

A leading constitutionalist member of Congress, Rep. Ron Paul (R.-Texas), issued a “[Statement on Burma, H Con Res 200](#)” on October 2, 2007, in which objected to legislation calling on the United Nations Security Council to “take appropriate action” with regard to Burma and its internal conditions. Dr. Paul warned: “This sounds like an open door for an outside military intervention under the auspices of the United Nations, which is something I do not support.”

Paul also noted that while he was “by no means unsympathetic to the current situation in Burma,” he



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strongly believed that “we would do better to promote freedom around the world by paying better attention to our rapidly eroding freedom here at home.”

Even though they are miles apart on most political issues, both Rep. Paul and Senator Webb have on occasion questioned the value of sanctions in dealing with oppressive governments.



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