

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 29, 2024

The Honorable Antony J. Blinken  
Secretary of State  
U.S. Department of State  
2201 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20520

The Honorable Samantha J. Power  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Secretary Blinken and Administrator Power,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding what appears to be a failure to meet the moment regarding the evolving situation in Burma. As the risk rises of a prolonged stalemate in the conflict, resulting in a permanently fragmented state, it is imperative that the U.S. government has a comprehensive and forward leaning strategy on Burma. We urgently need a revitalized approach, which will better support resistance forces within the country who are courageously standing up to the brutality of the military junta.

The United States should reinvigorate its diplomacy to bring together and empower the pro-democracy groups and ethnic organizations who are crucial to forming a future democratic government with an inclusive, federalist framework in Burma. Our diplomatic efforts should involve close and continued engagement with traditional constituencies such as the National League for Democracy (NLD) and the National Unity Government (NUG), as well as ethnic organizations who have recently gained and are holding considerable swaths of territory across the country. While the People's Republic of China manipulates all sides of the conflict to advance its strategic interests and influence in the region, recent developments in Burma open up the possibility of creative multilateral diplomacy and coordination with ASEAN and key partners in the Indo-Pacific, including Thailand, Japan, and India. Multilateral support for the various resistance groups will be crucial in charting a course for a stable, democratic political future in Burma, and multilateral assistance with reconstruction and development efforts will be essential following the conflict. At the same time, the United States and international partners should continue to make clear to all armed actors that they must protect civilian populations and allow for unhindered humanitarian access, and that the United States will promote accountability for those who commit abuses.

The United States should also revisit the Burma sanctions regime and explore new accountability actions, including those that target the aviation fuel sector, to maintain pressure on the junta and deprive it of the financial, economic, and military resources it needs to continue its campaign of violence against the Burmese people. We applaud the success that has been achieved working with Singapore to constrain the flow of weapons to the regime and hope that a similar effort will be possible as financial flows move to other countries in the region, including Thailand and Vietnam.

We also have concerns over the State Department's and USAID's insufficient implementation, and unnecessarily narrow interpretation, of the non-lethal assistance provisions of the Burma Act. Resistance groups are facing relentless military attacks and indiscriminate bombings by junta forces. Providing these groups with non-lethal items such as medical equipment, body armor, early warning radar systems, drone jammers, and similar tools for use against the junta's ISR drones will give them additional protection from these regime attacks. The slow pace of implementation and unnecessarily narrow interpretation of the "non-lethal assistance" authority provided by Congress have significantly hampered the U.S. government's efforts to provide timely and impactful support to resistance forces. It is our understanding that this stems from a policy decision not to provide these kinds of life-saving resources in spite of the authorities provided by Congress, and we urge you to reconsider this decision.

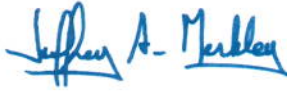
We reaffirm Congress' willingness to coordinate closely with you to find strategic and impactful ways to assist the Burmese people, avoid a protracted conflict that impacts the broader region, prevent entrenched PRC influence, and work in concert with partners and allies. The United States has stood with the Burmese people for decades against this oppressive military regime, and we must not cede U.S. leadership at this critical inflection point, but rather do everything in our power to support the hopes and aspirations of the people of Burma, from all of its diverse communities, for a democratic, peaceful, and prosperous future.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

  
Benjamin L. Cardin  
United States Senator

  
Mitch McConnell  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey A. Merkley in blue ink.

Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of James E. Risch in blue ink.

James E. Risch  
United States Senator

Handwritten signature of Todd Young in blue ink.

Todd Young  
United States Senator