



## The Coup in Burma: One Year Later

### Since February 1, 2021

In the year since the coup in Burma, the military junta has encountered an overwhelming popular opposition. Although the uprising began with peaceful protests, the military's indiscriminate violence soon reignited Burma's decades-old civil war. Burma is now locked in a conflict for legitimacy and control of the state between the military in Naypyidaw and a loose coalition of pro-democracy and anti-junta forces, most prominently the National Unity Government (led by ousted parliamentarians) and an array of ethnic armed groups.

Since the first day of the takeover, the United States has reiterated its firm support for a return to democracy in Burma and its opposition to the coup with the following actions:

- Reiterated its support for a return to democracy in a variety of international fora, including several meetings of the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#), Secretary of State Antony Blinken's speech in Jakarta on a ["Free and Open Indo-Pacific,"](#) the [East Asia Summit](#), and in engagements with [ASEAN](#).
- Issued a suite of [targeted sanctions](#) against the military, coup leaders, and their economic interests.
- Delayed the credentialing in the United Nations of the junta's preferred UN representative in favor of the incumbent National League for Democracy's ambassador.
- Engaged with the National Unity Government's representatives on [several occasions](#).
- Worked with allies and partners to coordinate against the military takeover, particularly the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and with ASEAN on its Five-Point Consensus.
- Provided [humanitarian assistance](#) and vaccines, including [\\$180 million](#) for Rohingya refugees.
- Passed [S. 1605 – National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022](#), which mandates a variety of actions in support of democracy and against the junta.

However, these policy actions have limited impact on the situation on the ground, and the junta is acquiring additional international support, particularly from China, Cambodia, and Russia. This year, the humanitarian crisis, civil war, and competition over international support between the junta and its pro-democracy opponents is only likely to worsen.





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### Policy Recommendations

From a U.S. perspective, there are a variety of policy actions that U.S. Congress and the Administration have available to apply further pressure on the regime and promote democracy:

1. The United States could advance a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly against the military's use of air-strikes. Air power is the junta's most important military advantage over anti-junta forces, and air strikes against civilians have escalated over the past months, thus triggering an influx of internally displaced persons.
2. The United States could use its diplomatic leverage on Thailand and India to accept humanitarian safe zones.
3. The United States could balance Cambodia's efforts to legitimize the junta through cooperation with likeminded countries in ASEAN, most notably Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. ASEAN's Five-Point Consensus remains unenforced, and the United States could cooperate more closely with likeminded allies and partners to advance its provisions while ensuring ASEAN centrality.
4. The United States could help the National Unity Government open a representative office in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the United States could consider formally recognizing the National Unity Government.
5. The United States expand its sanctions and work with allies and partners on coordinating sanctions policy. This could include sanctions targeting the junta's Myanmar Oil and Gas Enterprise (MOGE), its primary revenue source, as well as secondary sanctions on foreign companies doing business with military-owned firms and providing it arms.
6. The United States could find ways to work with China to end military rule in Burma. Chinese support for the junta is conditional upon the military's ability to ensure stability in Burma. If Beijing can be persuaded that the junta is unable to acquire control, then there is a chance that it could shift support to pro-democracy forces, as it has maintained ties to the National League for Democracy.
7. The United States could engage and support the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC) for the future of an inclusive Burma. The NUCC is the most inclusive political actor in Burmese history, and it incorporates representatives from across the spectrum in Burma. Ensuring that all ethnic groups have a stake in the future of Burma is crucial for its long-term stability, and the NUCC is the best-placed actor for this. The United States will likely also have to increase engagements with ethnic armed organizations, as they form a large portion of the forces fighting the junta and will remain important actors going forward.
8. The United States could pursue a multilateral approach to support the democratic movement and oppose military rule. In particular, this means persuading allies and partners to apply greater pressure on the junta. Australia, India, and Japan in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue remain concerned about Chinese influence and are thus unwilling to sanction the military. Encouraging their support will be crucial for sustained pressure.
9. The United States could officially designate a U.S. special envoy or coordinator for Burma as a strong signal of U.S. intentions to assist Burma's democratic struggle and a focal point for diplomatic coordination.
10. U.S. Congress could consider passing H.R. 5497 – BURMA Act of 2021, which incorporate some of the policy actions outlined in this policy brief, and other legislative actions that signal support for democracy in Burma and hold the junta accountable.

Information courtesy of

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For more of our analysis on the situation in Burma, please see the following:



#### Asia Dispatches

[The Coup D'état in Myanmar: a Year of International Inaction](#)



#### The Asian Times

[How the U.S. Could Counter China in Myanmar](#)



#### The Irrawaddy

[Myanmar's Military Knows Only the Language of Force](#)