

**Statement of
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Before the

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific**

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Oversight of U.S. Policy Toward Burma

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you very much for inviting me here today to discuss our engagement with Burma. I welcome your interest in this issue. Congress has been instrumental in shaping U.S. policy over the years, and the Department of Defense views Congress as a valued partner in developing and implementing a strategy for re-engagement with the military in Burma.

As Senior Advisor Cefkin has outlined, the Government of Burma has made notable progress in pushing through significant political, economic, and social reforms over the past two years. We in the Department of Defense welcome the many steps the Government has taken and commend the progress made in this short period.

The military in Burma remains critical to the ultimate success of the reform efforts and a full transition to democracy. After decades of tight control of the country and the economy, the military arguably has had the most to lose from the transition to a more open and transparent government. The importance of the military's support of reforms so far should not be underestimated. At this time, we believe the military is positioned to continue supporting the government's reform program and is interested in taking steps to modernize, professionalize, and reform itself as well. At the same time, the Burmese military retains a prominent role in politics and the economy, continues to face allegations of human rights abuses, and

retains some ties to North Korea. It is clear that a meaningful and sustainable transition for the country and for its military will take many years.

Given the complex reality of the military's role, our policy supports two clear goals: encouraging the military to continue its support for reforms and enhancing the military's understanding of and ability to respect human rights and civilian authority and control. The Department of Defense has worked closely with the Department of State and other interagency partners to develop a limited and calibrated set of engagements with the Burmese military in support of these goals. The steps we are taking are in line with the recommendations of a range of Burmese stakeholders, including members of the opposition and ethnic groups, who urge us to engage the armed forces to build support for the reform agenda and help the military itself modernize and transform.

So far, DoD's only interactions with the Burmese military in the last two years have consisted of the following:

- **diplomatic engagement**, including participation in the first annual U.S.-Burma Human Rights Dialogue in Naypyidaw in October 2012 and pull-asides with Burmese counterparts at multilateral forums like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus Ministerial;
- the **resumption of accounting operations** for U.S. World War II personnel still unaccounted for in the country;
- **Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies-sponsored academic exchanges and workshops** focused on promoting civilian control of the military, rule of law, civil-military relations, understanding of international norms and the law of armed conflict, and the military role in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief;
- support for the Government of Thailand's proposal to include **Burmese observers in the 2013 COBRA GOLD Exercise Observer Program**, during which two officers observed staff planning and humanitarian portions of the greater COBRA GOLD Exercise; and
- **Defense Institute of International Legal Studies (DIILS)-sponsored introductory exchanges** with Burmese military leaders,

judge advocate officers, and professional development staff to share views on our approaches to human rights law and law of armed conflict.

These interactions have been largely symbolic. Under current restrictions, we cannot undertake any training or education programs such as DIILS courses on human rights and international humanitarian law. But our limited engagements have begun to expose the military to international norms of behavior and fostered new trust and understanding. This will help us gain influence with the Burmese military and encourage reform after decades of disengagement.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I want to be absolutely clear: the Department does not seek and is not recommending the full normalization of bilateral defense ties with Burma at this time. We are not suggesting the resumption of Foreign Military Financing (FMF) or full International Military Education and Training (IMET) programs now. Barring significant further progress by Burma in various areas of reform, the engagement we seek over the next year would be limited and calibrated to support reforms and help the Burmese military improve its accountability and transparency.

Specifically, we hope over the next year to continue existing activities we have started and to expand DIILS's engagement to include more formal human rights training for Burmese military officials. We also see value in engagement that would support the institutional changes required to promote better civil-military relations, increased transparency, and greater civilian oversight—through the Defense Institutional Reform Initiative, for example, which works to develop effective, accountable, professional and transparent defense establishments in partner countries.

We also recommend initiating steps to build Burma's capacity to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to its population and better respond to catastrophic disasters like Cyclone Nargis in 2008. Initial outreach in this area could include programs such as disaster relief exercises and joint outreach programs like PACIFIC ANGEL or PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP. The Department looks forward to working with Congress to craft these engagements appropriately. All engagements would fully adhere to all relevant sanctions, policy restrictions, and vetting requirements.

It is important to note that under current sanctions we lack any dedicated mechanism for such reform-oriented engagement with the Burmese military. The tool for this kind of process is under expanded-IMET or "E-IMET," which is a scaled and targeted subset of IMET that allows only education and training related to civilian control of the military, improving military justice in accordance with internationally recognized human rights, proper management of defense resources, and cooperation between police and military for counternarcotics. We look forward to working with Congress on this kind of programming so our reform-focused engagement can be more transparent and regularized.

This administration has determined that any expansion of bilateral defense engagement will be contingent upon further progress by the Government of Burma in the areas of democratization, human rights, national reconciliation, and suspending all military ties to North Korea. Examples of steps and initiatives that would signal progress by the Burmese Government include full, open and regular humanitarian access for the United Nations and other non-governmental organizations to vulnerable populations in conflict areas across the country, greater transparency into military command structures and operations, the establishment of an independent internal review mechanism like an ombudsman, continued progress meeting commitment to prevent the use of child soldiers, and strong commitment to an enduring peace process. These examples are by no means exhaustive, and we will continue to work closely with colleagues across the interagency and members of civil society to evaluate progress in these and other areas.

Finally, I want to emphasize that this limited set of activities to reengage the Burmese military is something we look to do because it is in the national interest of the United States. Burma's progress is almost certain to be bumpy, with steps forward and backward. So we will be deliberate and flexible in our reengagement with the Burmese military. Should the reform effort in Burma head the wrong direction or the military stop making progress in the areas I've outlined, the Department of Defense can and will reassess our plan. The Departments of Defense and State both believe that our calibrated approach reinforces the steps the Burmese Government has already taken and recognizes the fragility of this process.

Mr. Chairman, members of the Subcommittee, I realize that there is considerable skepticism about whether increased engagement with the Burmese military will contribute to positive changes in the behavior and policies of the

Burmese military and Government of Burma as a whole. There is also much debate about exactly where the U.S. leverage lies and whether engagement might suggest that the U.S. Government has abandoned our principled stand on human rights, democracy, and other reforms. Quite to the contrary, our careful re-engagement reinforces the principled stance of the United States. There can be no guarantee that our engagement will bring about the changes we seek, but we have a unique opportunity for the first time in decades to work with a government and military in Burma open to implementing reforms and accepting U.S. advice, training, and assistance to that end. We should seize on this opportunity—and are being encouraged to do so by reformers within and outside the government, including former political prisoners and ethnic communities. If we do not engage now, we could undermine the very reformers we seek to support. Reform should offer the Burmese military an avenue towards becoming a modern, professional, and highly respected institution in Burma and internationally. We should be a part of that possible future by being a supportive partner now and only waver if the reform project suffers significant setbacks or the military fails to move forward with reform.

Burma's transformation is a learning process for the government in Naypyidaw, and also for us as we attempt to calibrate our engagement to support reform. After decades of self-imposed isolation, the Government of Burma is tackling a daunting list of challenges as it attempts to reform, and the military is facing an uncertain future. Some in the military may resist changes that affect their primacy and well-being. It is important that the United States be there—in a careful and calibrated way—to help the Burmese military make this transition effectively and envision a new role that adheres to international standards. Today the Burmese military is requesting support for this kind of transformation and we have a chance to help them understand international norms and standards through careful and calibrated military engagement.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to testify before your committee today. I look forward to answering any questions you or your colleagues may have.