

# Readings for Geopolitics Discussion On Myanmar (Burma) - July 26, 2012

“The Ultimate Guide to Myanmar” <http://myanmar.com/>

From Wikipedia

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## Burma or Republic of the Union of Myanmar

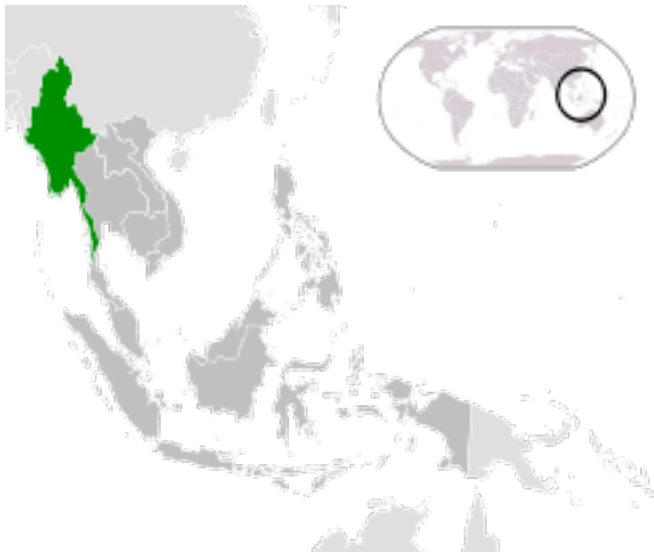
ပြည်ထောင်စု သမ္မတ မြန်မာနိုင်ငံတော်

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[Flag](#)

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Location of **Burma** (green)  
in [ASEAN](#) (dark grey) — [[Legend](#)]

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Capitol - [Naypyidaw](#)

Largest City [Yangon](#) (Rangoon)

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Language [Burmese](#)

Dialects [Jingpho](#), [Kayah](#), [Karen](#), [Chin](#), [Mon](#), [Rakhine](#), [Shan](#)

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Minorities - Burman 68% Shan 9% Karen 7% Rakhine 4%  
Chinese 3% Indian 2% Mon 2% other 5%

Burma ([/i/ˈbɜːrmə/ bur-mə](#)), also Myanmar ([/i/ˌmjaːnˈmɑː/ myahn--mar](#)), is a country in Southeast Asia. It is bordered by India, Bangladesh, China, Laos and Thailand. One-third of Burma's total perimeter of 1,930 kilometres (1,200 mi) forms an uninterrupted coastline along the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea. At 676,578 km<sup>2</sup> (261,227 sq mi), it is the 40th largest country in the world and the second largest country in Southeast Asia. Burma is also the 24th most populous country in the world with over 60.28 million people.[6]

Burma is home to some of the early civilizations of Southeast Asia including the Pyu and the Mon. [7] In the 9th century, the Burmans of the Kingdom of Nanzhao entered the upper Irrawaddy valley and, following the establishment of the Pagan Empire in the 1050s, the Burmese language and culture slowly became dominant in the country. During this period, Theravada Buddhism gradually became the predominant religion of the country. The Pagan Empire fell due to the Mongol invasions (1277–1301), and several warring states emerged. In the second half of the 16th century, the country was reunified by the Taungoo Dynasty which for a brief period was the largest empire in the history of Southeast Asia. [8] The early 19th century Konbaung Dynasty ruled over an area that included modern Burma as well as Manipur and Assam. The country was colonized by Britain following three Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824–1885). British rule brought social, economic, cultural and administrative changes. Since independence in 1948, the country has been in one of the longest running civil wars among the country's myriad ethnic groups that remains unresolved. From 1962 to 2011, the country was under military rule. The military junta was officially dissolved in 2011 following a general election in 2010 and a nominally civilian government installed, though the military retains enormous influence.

Burma is a resource-rich country. However, the Burmese economy is one of the least developed in the world. Burma's GDP stands at \$42.953 billion and grows at an average rate of 2.9% annually – the lowest rate of economic growth in the Greater Mekong Subregion. [9] Among others, the EU, United States and Canada have imposed economic sanctions on Burma. [10] Burma's health care system is one of the worst in the world: The World Health Organization ranked Burma at 190th, the worst performing of all countries.

The United Nations and several other organizations have reported consistent and systematic human rights violations in the country, including child labour, human trafficking and a lack of freedom of speech. In recent years, the country and its military leadership has made large concessions to democratic activists and is slowly improving its relations with the major powers and the UN.

**Yahoo News July 20, 2012 US envoy says too early to end all Myanmar sanctions**

The new US ambassador to Myanmar said Friday that it was too soon to abolish all sanctions against the former pariah, as Congress considers extending a ban on imports from the impoverished country.

"We have said in the past, and I have said, that we endorse continuing to keep in place many of the authorities -- the sanctions authorities -- in Congress," said Derek Mitchell, who took up his new post earlier this month.

Keeping some measures in place was "an insurance policy for the future in case things reverse," he told reporters, noting the fast pace of reforms since the end of decades of military rule last year.

"We're talking about a rapid process. It's only really been a little over a year and there are still some questions about the future," he said, adding that the import ban could be revisited later if the reform process continues.

A US Senate finance committee on Wednesday backed prolonging the ban on goods made in Myanmar for three years, while preserving the government's right to waive or scrap the measures. The extension still needs full Congressional approval.

It came a week after the United States gave the green light to US companies to invest in Myanmar including in oil and gas, in its broadest and most controversial easing yet of sanctions on the country formerly known as Burma.

US companies have been pressing the Obama administration to end restrictions on investment, fearing they will lose out to European and Asian competitors that already enjoy access to the potentially lucrative economy.

Mitchell said that investment, "done according to traditional US corporate principles and values," could serve the long-term interests of the Myanmar people.

The veteran policymaker is the first US ambassador to Myanmar since Washington withdrew its envoy after a crackdown on a pro-democracy uprising in 1988 and elections won by the opposition in 1990 that were never recognised by the junta.

<http://news.yahoo.com/us-envoy-says-too-early-end-myanmar-sanctions-160233646.html>  
NY Times - Myanmar Updated: June 10, 2012

Myanmar, a Southeast Asian country that was formerly known as Burma, has been under military rule in one form or another since 1962, when General Ne Win staged a coup that toppled a civilian government. The current junta, formed in 1988, threw out the results of a democratic parliamentary election in 1990 that was overwhelmingly won by the party led by Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the winner of the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize and the daughter of Aung San, one of the heroes of the nation's independence from the British Empire in 1948. For 15 years, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi was placed under house arrest.

After years of stagnation, change is coming to Myanmar at a rapid pace, though still on the military's terms. Nonetheless, there is hope that the country is veering away from authoritarianism and Soviet-style economic management that has left the majority of the country's 55 million people in dire poverty.

Since taking office in March 2011 after deeply flawed elections, President U Thein Sein, a former general, has moved swiftly toward democratization, breaking sharply from the highly centralized and erratic policies of the past.

Mr. Thein Sein's government has freed a number of political prisoners and taken steps to liberalize the state-controlled economy. It made overtures to Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been released from house arrest in 2010. In response, in January 2012, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi and her party, the National League for Democracy, returned to political life, running candidates in parliamentary elections. In April, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi was elected to Parliament and her party won nearly every seat in the elections — a startling result after her years of detention and the violent suppression of her supporters.

Still, the Parliament remained overwhelmingly controlled by the military-backed ruling party.

In May, the Obama administration decided to ease the ban on investments in Myanmar, a move that followed steps by the European Union and Australia to suspend sanctions, raising the prospect of a foreign investment boom in one of Asia's most isolated countries.

#### Deadly Violence Raises Buddhist-Muslim Tensions

In June, deadly riots broke out in a western state in Myanmar, posing another obstacle to the government of Mr. Thein Sein as he tries to steer the country toward democracy. On June 10, speaking on national television, Mr. Thein Sein declared a state of emergency in Rakhine State, where at least 17 people have been killed in a month of sectarian violence between Buddhists and Muslims.

Soldiers and police officers were trying to restore order in villages where clashes between Buddhists and Muslims have left many villagers wounded and 500 homes burned.

It was unclear what the practical consequences of emergency rule would be; the military and the police in Myanmar already wield significant power despite the country's move toward democracy.

Mr. Thein Sein has made national reconciliation between the Burmese majority and the country's vast patchwork of ethnic group a priority of his presidency. But the tensions near the border with Bangladesh fall outside the scope of reconciliation efforts because they involve people from a Muslim ethnic group, the Rohingya, whose 800,000 members the government does not recognize as citizens.

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/myanmar/index.html>

#### **Burma - Government to end prior censorship**

## **IFEX Wednesday 16th May, 2012**

(Mizzima News/IFEX) - 15 May 2012 - The Burmese government will end prior censorship of news publications and form a press council to advise on media laws and ethnics, Information Minister Kyaw Hsan told journalists on Monday. In a meeting held at Myanmar Radio and Television, he said that the changes would come into effect in June and July. The council would include representatives from Myanmar Journalist Association (MJA), Myanmar Journalist Unio... Burma - Government to end prior censorship  
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[//www.myanmarnews.net/story.php?rid=205870084://](http://www.myanmarnews.net/story.php?rid=205870084://)

## **NY Times - July 13, 2012 Moshahida Sultana Ritu, an economist, teaches at the University of Dhaka, in Bangladesh. Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar**

LAST spring, a flowering of democracy in Myanmar mesmerized the world. But now, three months after the democracy activist Daw Aung San Suu Kyi won a parliamentary seat, and a month after she traveled to Oslo to belatedly receive the 1991 Nobel Peace Prize, an alarm bell is ringing in Myanmar. In the villages of Arakan State, near the Bangladeshi border, a pogrom against a population of Muslims called the Rohingyas began in June. It is the ugly side of Myanmar's democratic transition — a rotting of the flower, even as it seems to bloom.

Cruelty toward the Rohingyas is not new. They have faced torture, neglect and repression in the Buddhist-majority land since it achieved independence in 1948. Its constitution closes all options for Rohingyas to be citizens, on grounds that their ancestors didn't live there when the land, once called Burma, came under British rule in the 19th century (a contention the Rohingyas dispute). Even now, as military rulers have begun to loosen their grip, there is no sign of change for the Rohingyas. Instead, the Burmese are trying to cast them out.

The current violence can be traced to the rape and killing in late May of a Buddhist woman, for which the police reportedly detained three Muslims. That was followed by mob attacks on Rohingyas and other Muslims that killed dozens of people. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, state security forces have now conducted mass arrests of Muslims; they destroyed thousands of homes, with the impact

falling most heavily on the Rohingyas. Displaced Rohingyas have tried to flee across the Naf River to neighboring Bangladesh; some have died in the effort.

The Burmese media have cited early rioting by Rohingyas and have cast them as terrorists and traitors. In mid-June, in the name of stopping such violence, the government declared a state of emergency. But it has used its border security force to burn houses, kill men and evict Rohingyas from their villages. And on Thursday, President Thein Sein suggested that Myanmar could end the crisis by expelling all of its Rohingyas or by having the United Nations resettle them — a proposal that a United Nations official quickly rejected.

This is not sectarian violence; it is state-supported ethnic cleansing, and the nations of the world aren't pressing Myanmar's leaders to stop it. Even Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi has not spoken out.

Why isn't this pogrom arousing more international indignation? Certainly, Myanmar has become a destination for capital investment now that the United States, the European Union and Canada have accepted the government's narrative of democratic transition and have largely lifted the economic sanctions they began applying after 1988 (measures that did not prevent China, India, South Korea, Thailand, Singapore and multinational oil companies from doing business with the Burmese). Still, when Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton visited Myanmar late last year and welcomed its first steps toward democratization, she also set down conditions for strengthening ties, including an end to ethnic violence.

The plight of the Rohingyas begins with their statelessness — the denial of citizenship itself, for which Myanmar is directly responsible. To be sure, Bangladesh can do more. Its river border with Myanmar is unprotected; thousands of Rohingyas have been rowing or swimming it at night. But even though Bangladesh has sheltered such refugees in the past — hundreds of thousands of Rohingyas live here now, legally or illegally — it has been reluctant so far this year to welcome them, out of fear of encouraging an overwhelming new influx. But the world should be putting its spotlight on Myanmar. It should not so eagerly welcome democracy in a country that leaves thousands of stateless men and women floating in a river, their corpses washing up on its shores, after they have been reviled in, and driven from, a land in which their families have lived for centuries.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/13/opinion/ethnic-cleansing-of-myanmars-rohingyas.html?scp=2&sq=Myanmar+ethnic+cleansing+of+Rohingyas&st=nyt>

**NY Times June 19, 2012, Bangladesh's Right of Refusal**

By DAN MORRISON DHAKA, Bangladesh — The Rohingyas of Myanmar would seem to be a most impolite people. They refuse to die.

A population of Muslims descended from Burmese Buddhists, ethnic Bengalis and Arab seafarers, the Rohingyas are despised and violated in their homeland and often rejected when they seek refuge elsewhere.

Since last week, Bangladeshi authorities have turned back boats carrying more than 800 Rohingyas who were fleeing attacks by members of the Buddhist majority in Myanmar's Rakhine state. Bangladesh, which already plays unwilling host to an estimated 300,000 Rohingyas, hasn't been swayed by pleas from Washington and other governments to let new arrivals in.

Bangladesh's refusal to help these desperate families is, despite its claims to the contrary, a likely violation of its international obligations. It's also entirely reasonable.

To date, Bangladesh has justified the denial of sanctuary through cold, legalistic claims. "Bangladesh never signed any kind of international act, convention or law for allowing and giving shelter to refugees," the foreign minister, Dipu Moni, said last week. "That's why we are not bound to provide shelter to the Rohingyas."

Bangladeshi officials might serve their case better by condemning the violence while pointing out that Bangladesh is among the world's poorest and most densely populated countries, that in 1978 and 1991 it sheltered Rohingyas fleeing ethnic cleansing in Myanmar and that as it struggles to meet the aspirations of its 160 million citizens, it cannot consider another "temporary" influx of refugees.

Rohingyas face a deep well of hatred [paid content] within Myanmar, where nation-building has often meant cutting segments of the population out of the civic fabric. While some ethnic groups are granted a form of partial citizenship, the country's 800,000 Rohingyas lost theirs in Myanmar's 1982 constitution. They are officially stateless.

<http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/19/bangladeshs-refusal-to-take-in-rohingyas-from-myanmar/?scp=1&sq=Myamar+ethnic+cleansing+of+Rohingyas&st=nyt>

At this web site - The Economist - there are a number of articles on Myanmar. I have printed a brief selection from one. WOK

FEW outside her homeland would dream these days of criticising Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's opposition leader. On her tour of Europe last month, she was swaddled in praise verging on adulation. Her dignity, courage, intelligence and good humour confirmed her many longtime admirers in their good opinion and won her new ones. But at home she is now a politician, not a political prisoner. Flak comes with the territory. Myanmar's election commission has chided her for not "respecting the constitution", by

repeatedly calling the country not “Myanmar” but “Burma”. Perhaps more worrying for her is that groups representing Myanmar's ethnic minorities are voicing doubts about her.

A particular problem she faced in Europe was how to react to the ugly racial violence in early June in the western state of Rakhine, directed at the Rohingyas, a Muslim minority. Dozens of people are thought to have died, and 90,000 been displaced. The much-persecuted Rohingyas are viewed as illegal immigrants by the majority of Burmans, who are mostly Buddhist, and indeed by other minorities, too. Many would have been dismayed had Miss Suu Kyi, when asked if the Rohingyas were Burmese, replied other than she did: “I do not know.”

It was an awkward dilemma that some local analysts are convinced was deliberately created by Myanmar's army. If the generals did have a hand in fomenting the violence they would have had several aims: to embarrass Miss Suu Kyi with either—or both—her domestic and foreign audiences; to reassert their own importance, which was demonstrated when a state of emergency was declared in the state; and to deflect attention from campaigns elsewhere, notably against ethnic-Kachin rebels.

[http://www.economist.com/search/apachesolr\\_search/Myanmar](http://www.economist.com/search/apachesolr_search/Myanmar)

**Our Resource Person, Dr. Kyaw Win, has suggested several books on Myanmar if you wish to pursue the topic.**

Andrew Marshall - The Trouser People

EmmaLarkin - Secret Histories

Bertyl Lintnen - Burma in Revolt (published in 1948)