

Why China Supports Burma's Dictators

By Dustin Stokes

Introduction

Burma, also known as Myanmar, is governed by a repressive dictatorship that is guilty of numerous human rights abuses. Political prisoners, oppressed women and ethnic minorities, and child soldiers are examples of human rights violations in Burma. Burma's government benefits from its relationship with China, whose support for the dictatorship is motivated by its own economic and strategic interests. The United States and its Western allies must alter their existing Burma policy, which has been part of the problem, in order to help end the suffering of the Burmese people.

China's Support for Burma's Repressive Dictatorship

Extent of Relationship between China and Burma

China is Burma's most significant supporter. The two governments maintain diplomatic contacts at the highest levels, and Burma is home to more than one million Chinese nationals. China is also Burma's largest source of investment and trade. No fewer than sixty-nine Chinese companies are engaged in at least ninety energy-related projects in Burma (EarthRights International 2008). Moreover, China has given Burma \$2 billion in military aid; it has provided military advisors and is actively training Burmese soldiers. China's military presence in Burma represents its most significant presence in a foreign country since the Vietnam War. The strong Chinese presence in Burma indicates how important this country is to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Why Relations with Burma are Important to China

The CCP's support for Burma is motivated by its urgent need for energy to supply its rapidly growing economy. The CCP realizes that its survival depends on its ability to maintain China's growth, which has lifted hundreds of millions out of poverty in recent decades. Consequently, the CCP is willing to subordinate what it views as abstract notions of human rights to its primary goals of domestic growth and stability.

China's growth means increasing energy demands; therefore, a central CCP objective is locating new sources of energy. China and Burma have agreed to a pipeline deal that will bring oil from Burma's coast to China. The pipeline will end Chinese dependence on the Malacca Strait route, which is dominated by India's navy and lies between China and its primary source of oil—the Persian Gulf. The CCP's goal of national development drives China's pursuit of energy in Burma.

Human Rights Abuses in Burma

Driven by self-interest, China has developed close relations with Burma's government despite the latter's many human rights abuses. There are about 2250 political prisoners in Burma, largely due to the government's ban on peaceful protest. This ban has figured prominently in recent years due to the government's response to two events: an anti-government protest in 2007 and a devastating cyclone in 2008 (Mathieson 2009).

First, the government violently repressed protests led by thousands of Buddhist monks, who are revered in Burma, leaving dozens of people dead, more injured, and many in prison. Second, the government rejected foreign aid directed toward Cyclone Nargis's victims, and even imprisoned Burmese citizens who tried to provide aid. For example, popular Burmese comedian Zarganar was sentenced to forty-five years in prison for spearheading efforts to raise money for cyclone victims. Furthermore, the government conditioned what little aid it did provide on whether or not would-be recipients voted for its constitution.

The most well-known political prisoner in Burma, Aung San Suu Kyi, the 2009 Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award winner, has been detained fourteen of the last twenty years. First imprisoned in July 1989, following the government's crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy protests, Aung San Suu Kyi had her sentence, scheduled to expire in May 2009, extended another eighteen months by the government after an uninvited American stranger appeared at her residence earlier that month.

Other human rights problems in Burma include the oppression of women and ethnic minorities. Burma's military uses rape and other sexual crimes against women as a weapon of war. Moreover, many displaced Burmese women end up as sex slaves in neighboring Thailand. Women who are members of Burma's ethnic minorities are especially vulnerable. The men and children are not much better off, as ethnic minorities in general are targeted by Burma's military. For example, researchers found that the mortality rate of ethnic Karens was twice that found in an average developing country (Checchi et al. 2003).

Finally, with 75,000 child soldiers, Burma's military junta has been identified as the world's largest employer of child soldiers (Singer 2005: 27). Through abduction and brainwashing—and under the threat of death—these innocent children are forced to wage war against their fellow citizens.

China's View of Sovereignty and its Support for Burma

Despite these abuses, China continues to support Burma, as the CCP does not think that foreign governments should interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign nation. This view of sovereignty leads China to protect Burma in the United Nations Security Council. In 2007, China (along with Russia) vetoed a UN resolution, which it had twice previously kept off the UN ballot that condemned Burma's government and called for it to end human rights abuses. China's stringent view of sovereignty largely stems from its fear that other global powers might one day intervene in Chinese territory. China opposes almost any intervention in other parts of the world—even in the case of massive human rights violations—due to the precedent such intervention might set.

Western Policy Impact on China's Role in Burma

Impact of Past Policies

China's support for Burma's repressive government undermines Western policies aimed at promoting human rights in other countries. However, at least part of the blame may lie with the policies themselves. One reason China and Burma have developed close ties is that, by seeking to isolate and punish the Burmese government, the West has ostracized Burma and left it nowhere else to turn.

Similarly, China's willingness to support Burma may have roots in certain US actions. The Sino-Burma relationship deepened after two important developments. First, "color revolutions" occurred in multiple countries in the former Soviet Union. China perceived the United States to be an important catalyst in these revolutions. Secondly, US foreign policy became more unilateralist and anti-China during the first term of the George W. Bush administration.

Because of these two developments, the CCP felt compelled to find allies wherever it could. China's leadership was especially worried about nations on their borders—such as Burma. If Burma was drawn too close to the West, then a "color revolution" could be fomented there. Moreover, political change in Burma could inspire similar changes, not only on its borders, but also within China's autonomous regions. Such fears strengthened the hand of China's hard-liners, who advocated support for Burma's dictatorship.

Adding credence to this argument are China's actions in the last two years. After the United States decreased its hostility toward China and began to encourage China to become a "responsible stakeholder" in the international system, China showed more willingness to cooperate with the West. Realizing that unconditional support for dictatorships may not be in its long-term interest, China became less willing to turn a blind eye to repression in Burma. In response to the new US approach, China condemned human rights violations in Burma and even met with Burma's anti-government, pro-democracy opposition.

Recommendations for Future Policy

The failure of the West's Burma policy suggests the need for a new approach. First, the United States should lead a more coordinated international effort to deal with Burma. This effort should recognize that China must play a critical role in any effective approach. The coalition should be as broad as possible—it might include the UN Security Council, Burma's neighbors, and ASEAN—because China does not want to be seen as giving in to unilateral US pressure.

The US-led coalition's goal should be to push China (in a way that does not trigger Chinese nationalism and empower the nation's hard-liners) to respect international human rights norms in its relationship with Burma. This may require high-level diplomatic meetings between key actors on all sides to reassure China that political reform in Burma would not threaten Chinese security.

The US-led coalition should engage Burma's government, as talking to Burma's dictators is not an abandonment of US values. Rather, it would represent a more effective method of promoting those values. After all, the ten-year policy of isolation has not alleviated human rights abuse in Burma. Instead, it has strengthened the dictatorship's hold on power, while cutting off Burma's people from the rest of the world. A policy of engagement would lead to an increase in economic and social ties between Burma and the West, which would give the West more leverage to promote incremental human rights improvements.

In a promising development, the Obama administration, which called the policy of isolating Burma a failure, has begun engaging with Burma's political leaders. Through engagement, the administration may be able to gradually bring Burma into the community of responsible nations, which could allow the suffering Burmese people to enjoy increased freedom and prosperity. Such an outcome will depend on the success of US-led efforts to persuade China to exert its great influence over the Burmese dictatorship and to conform to global human rights norms.

Annotated Bibliography

Amnesty International. 2009. "Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's new sentence 'shameful'." Available online: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/news/daw-aung-san-suu-kyi-sentence-shameful-20090811>.

Annotation: The article explains the plight of Burmese political prisoner, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the National League for Democracy's leader, who has been in Burmese government custody for thirteen of the last twenty years—mostly under house arrest. She was scheduled to be released in May of 2009. However, after an uninvited American stranger unexpectedly showed up at her house earlier that month, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was sentenced to eighteen more months of house arrest. She was first imprisoned in July of 1989 following the government's crackdown on pro-democracy protests. Amnesty International considers her a "prisoner of conscience," honoring her with the 2009 Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award.

Amnesty International. 2009. "Human Rights in Union of Myanmar." Available online: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/myanmar/report-2009>.

Annotation: Amnesty International reports that Burma's government refused foreign aid for the victims of Cyclone Nargis, which killed 84,500 people, injured 19,000, and left 54,000 unaccounted for. Moreover, the government often conditioned survivors' access to aid on their having voted for the government's constitution. Meanwhile, Myanmar's armed forces continued a military campaign against ethnic Karens, committing crimes of humanity, which included extrajudicial executions, forced displacement, and torture. Individuals faced lengthy prison terms for violating Myanmar's laws against peaceful political activity. For example, comedian Zarganar was sentenced to forty-five years simply for leading the private donor movement and providing information about Cyclone Nargis victims. Also, blogger Nay Phone Latt received more than twenty years because of images and cartoons that appeared in his blogs. The violence and repression has led to 500,000 internally displaced people in Myanmar.

Bert, Wayne. 2004. "Burma, China and the U.S.A." *Pacific Affairs* 77 (2): 263-282.

Annotation: Bert explains how China is growing closer to Burma for both economic and strategic purposes. This has negatively impacted human rights in Burma. Moreover, he says that the United States' misguided policy has strengthened China's position vis-à-vis Burma as well as led to even worse human rights problems. Bert asserts that the United States should reengage the Burmese government and pursue incremental progress in the human rights situation through its increased leverage. Writing authoritatively and for a mostly academic audience, Bert not only demonstrates impressive knowledge of the problem but also convincingly argues for potential solutions.

Beyrer, C. 2001. "Shan women and girls and the sex industry in Southeast Asia; political causes and human rights implications." *Social Science and Medicine* 53 (4): 543-550.

Annotation: The author explains how, during civil conflicts, women are vulnerable to sexual violence, including rape and prostitution. More specifically, the article addresses how the Shan women of Burma are often ensnared in human trafficking in Thailand. The Shan state makes up a fourth of Burma's land mass. The decades-long civil conflict between Burma's ruling military junta and rebel groups has been particularly devastating for the Shan state, and especially for its women. Addressing an academic audience, the author makes a compelling argument that a key reason a disproportionate number of Thailand's sex workers are from Burma's Shan state is the military's strategy of targeting the women of that state as a weapon of war.

Cecchi, F., G. Elder, M. Schäfer, E. Drouhin, and D. Legros. 2003. "Consequences of armed conflict for an ethnic Karen population." *Lancet* 362 (9377): 74-75.

Annotation: The authors address the effects on the civilian population of the long-standing conflict between Burma's military junta and armed Karen opposition groups. The authors conducted a survey of displaced ethnic Karens who were taking refuge in camps on the border of Thailand. The findings validated the fears of researchers and human rights activists who thought that Burmese military attacks were taking a toll on the Karen population: results of the survey showed a mortality rate within that population of twice the normal rate for developing countries. The authors convincingly argue that major human rights violations are being carried out by Burma's ruling junta in the Karen region and that humanitarian assistance is desperately needed.

Chen, Matthew E. 2007. "Chinese National Oil Companies and Human Rights." *Orbis* 51 (1): 41-54.

Annotation: Chen explains how China's urgent need to find new energy sources for its rapidly growing economy is leading it to support repressive governments in countries like Burma. To counter China's strategy, Chen says that the United States must not only engage the Chinese government, but also convince China's national oil companies to become stakeholders in the international energy market. Chen makes a strong case that, if the United States is unwilling or unable to take such measures to change China's current policy in Burma, then Beijing's strategy could encourage similar alliances with other developing nations, with terrible consequences for human rights around the world.

Cole, Bernard D. 2008. "Chinese military modernization and energy security: Conflict or cooperation?" in S. Zhao (ed.), *China-U.S. Relations Transformed*. New York: Routledge.

Annotation: In this chapter, Cole discusses the energy security concerns of rising China. He says China's pursuit of energy is motivated by the need to supply its growing economy as well as its efforts to modernize its navy—which, in turn, is motivated by China's concern over the US presence in Asia. This does not, according to the author, necessarily mean that

China's energy pursuit will cause conflict between the United States and China. The author also discusses how China's need for energy affects its relationships with its neighbors, including Myanmar. Writing for an academic audience, the author offers a useful explanation of China's energy security concerns.

Council on Foreign Relations. 2009. "U.S. Policy Shift on Myanmar." New York: Council on Foreign Relations. Available online: http://www.cfr.org/publication/20325/us_policy_shift_on_myanmar.html.

Annotation: This is a summary of an interview with Kara C. McDonald, in which she describes a shift in US policy towards Myanmar. Following a seven-month review of US policy on Myanmar, the Obama administration decided to adopt a new policy of engaging Myanmar's dictatorial leaders through direct talks, as Secretary of State Hilary Clinton says that the policy of isolating Myanmar has failed. McDonald says reviewing the failed policy is a positive step, although she is skeptical that engaging Myanmar's military junta will lead to reform in the country. She says that the United States should use the 2010 election in Myanmar to measure the progress of the regime's reforms. Finally, she indicates that the United States must work with the other Security Council members—such as China—as well as with Myanmar's neighbors to create a multilateral consensus on how to deal with the military regime.

Diamond, Larry Jay. 2008. *The Spirit of Democracy : The Struggle to Build Free Societies throughout the World*. New York: Times Books/Henry Holt and Co.

Annotation: In his book, Larry Diamond discusses how democracy spread throughout the world in recent decades. He admits that the spread of democracy has recently slowed and even reversed; however, he offers a hopeful and intelligent analysis of how scholars, policymakers, and citizens can once again bring about the expansion of democratic freedom around the globe. He discusses the factors that help create and sustain democratization, and he analyzes the prospects for democracy in every region of the world. Finally, he effectively demonstrates the steps democracy proponents—both inside and outside a country—can take to effect democratic change within an authoritarian state.

Earth Rights International. 2008. "China in Burma: The Increasing Investment of Chinese Multinational Corporations in Burma's Hydropower, Oil & Gas, and Mining Sectors." Available online: <http://www.earthrights.org/sites/default/files/publications/China-in-Burma-update-2008-English.pdf>.

Annotation: Earth Rights International, in this forty-seven-page report, discusses China's involvement in Burma. Burma's government, guilty of countless human rights abuses, has been condemned by the international community. Therefore, China—Burma's top supporter—has also drawn harsh criticism for its role in Burma. The report provides a detailed account of current projects being carried out by Chinese companies in Burma. Because of China's need to fuel its growing economy, there are sixty-nine Chinese

companies currently engaged in at least ninety energy-related projects. These include hydropower, oil and natural gas, and mining.

Global Agenda. 2007. "China winks at the West." *Global Agenda* (ISSN 1038-8451): 23-23.

Annotation: The article asserts that the interests of China and the United States are aligned on Burma—as well as on North Korea and Sudan. It claims that, in addition to helping the United States deal with North Korea and Sudan, China has successfully pressured Burma's military junta to stop abusing its own people. The article effectively explains the diplomatic efforts of China and the United States as well as the human rights situation in Burma. It demonstrates that the United States and China have many common interests, and its optimistic outlook on the situation involving China, the United States, and Burma is refreshing. However, the article overestimates the degree to which the United States and China have already realized what could—and should—be common ground.

Green, Michael, and Derek Mitchell. 2007. "Asia's Forgotten Crisis." *Foreign Affairs* 86 (6): 147-158.

Annotation: Michael Green and Derek Mitchell explain that the poor human rights situation in Burma is partly due to the approach taken by the United States and its Western allies. While the West has imposed sanctions on Burma, China and Russia have engaged the Burmese government more constructively, allowing both nations greater influence on the behavior of Burma's junta than that enjoyed by America and its allies. The authors suggest that America should lead a more proactive and coordinated international approach to dealing with human rights abuse in Burma. The authors are writing for an audience made up of foreign policy academics and practitioners, but the article's style would appeal to anyone interested in the human rights situation in Burma or in Chinese foreign policy. While short and not overly-detailed, the article offers a good introduction to the history of the problem, contemporary issues, and new approaches that could potentially be constructive.

Hafner-Burton, E. M. 2005. "Trading human rights: How preferential trade agreements influence government repression." *International Organization* 59 (3): 593-629.

Annotation: The author uses qualitative and quantitative analysis to argue that human rights agreements which lack a coercive element are ineffective. She says that, while Preferential Trade Agreements (PTAs) do not represent an ideal solution to human rights abuses, such agreements are one of the only ways of effectively pressuring repressive governments to alter their behavior. This is because PTAs, unlike human rights agreements (HRAs), link compliance with human rights standards with the benefits of integration into the global system of free trade. The author uses several case studies over the last three decades as well as statistical evidence to make a compelling argument that persuasion alone is less effective than agreements that utilize some element of coercion—withholding of the benefits that come with free trade agreements, for example. The article would appeal mainly to those with

an academic background who are interested in how the international community could influence the behavior of repressive governments.

Heppner, K., and J. Becker. 2002. "My gun was as tall as me: child soldiers in Burma." Human Rights Watch. Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2002/burma/Burma0902.pdf>.

Annotation: The authors of this report address the issue of child soldiers in Burma. As the title suggests, very young children are often forced into military service against their will and subsequently brainwashed and turned into trained killers. The book offers a very detailed account of the use of child soldiers by the Burmese military as well as by ethnic minority groups who oppose the government. Moreover, the authors recommend solutions to the various governments associated with the conflict as well as to international organizations that could help solve the problem. They say that the international community must put more pressure on the Burmese government to halt the use of child soldiers. The authors conclude by saying that, while many in the international community make the mistake of assuming that child soldiers are used by non-state actors, the Burmese government is actually the world's most prolific employer of child soldiers.

International Crisis Group. 2008. "Burma/Myanmar: After the Crackdown." Brussels: International Crisis Group. Available online: <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5273&l=1>.

Annotation: This report discusses the crackdown and aftermath of anti-government protests led by Buddhist monks in Burma. It also analyzes the responses of the international community and individual countries, concluding with recommendations on what each actor should do in the future. In September 2007, thousands of Burma's revered monks were joined by other dissidents in a protest against Burma's ruling party. The subsequent government crackdown—the most severe since thousands were shot dead in 1988—resulted in dozens of deaths. The crackdown caused international outrage; the United States and its allies increased sanctions, and China and the ASEAN nations—which usually back Burma—were moved to support UN measures to condemn the Burmese government. Rather than calling only for sanctions and other punitive measures, the report also recommends long term reconciliation and incremental reform in Burma.

Kleine-Ahlbrandt, Stephanie, and Andrew Small. 2008. "China's New Dictatorship Diplomacy." *Foreign Affairs* 87 (1): 38-56.

Annotation: Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Andrew Small argue that China is slowly becoming more constructive and helpful in dealing with repressive regimes like Burma's. They say that, while China's pursuit of energy has caused it to cooperate with Burma's repressive military junta even as the government brutalizes its own people, China has begun to rethink this strategy in recent years. While China's economic and political interests have kept it from completely altering its approach to Burma, it has begun to work with the United States and the international community to address the worst excesses of the junta. The

authors also note that, in changing its policy, China is not merely (or temporarily) acquiescing to international pressure, but also beginning to see that unquestioned support for brutal dictatorships may not be in its own long-term best interest. The authors think the United States should carefully manage China's evolving worldview by pushing China further toward international human rights norms without triggering a nationalist backlash. Kleine-Ahlbrandt and Small not only do an excellent job of explaining the core issues involved in the Burma problem, but they also cogently argue for how best to reach a solution.

Lampton, David M. 2008. The three faces of Chinese power: might, money, and minds. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Annotation: In this book, the author evaluates the rise of Chinese power and how it affects the world. His analysis is largely based on interviews with foreign policy elites in China, in the United States, and in Asian nations surrounding China. He explains how China's impact on the world is growing in the arenas of military, economic, and intellectual power. Among other things, he discusses how China provides foreign aid to nations based on little more than China's own economic and strategic interests. For example, China has extensive and growing ties with Myanmar despite governmental human rights abuses, basically due to China's economic and strategic interests.. Chinese support for the ruling military junta undermines US sanctions and leverage over Myanmar.

Leiter, K., V. Suwanvanichkij, I. Taimn, V. Iacopino, and C. Beyrer. 2006. "Human Rights Abuses and Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS: The Experiences of Burmese." *Health and human rights* 9 (2): 88-111.

Annotation: The authors address the issue of Burmese sexual crime victims in Thailand. These victims are female refugees fleeing conflict and human rights abuses in Burma. Unfortunately, Thailand's government is not doing enough to address the problem. Trafficking, sexual exploitation, and denial of basic rights are among the injustices faced by these displaced Burmese women. Due to the Burmese military junta's repression of its people (especially minorities), one million Burmese citizens are thought to be living in Thailand. Unfortunately, after successfully escaping Burma, these people often find more injustice in Thailand. The authors effectively make this argument by presenting the results of interviews they conducted with Burmese refugees in Thailand.

Leow, Jason. 2008. "China Is Urged to Use Influence With Junta." *Wall Street Journal - Eastern Edition* (May 12): A10.

Annotation: Leow's article reports that Human Rights Watch called for China to pressure Burma to accept the aid that foreign governments and NGOs were trying to provide for Burma's cyclone victims. China has utilized its cozy relationship with Burma's military junta to gain access to Burma's energy resources. However, fear of angering the Burmese government and losing its cooperation rendered China reluctant to join the world effort to pressure the Burmese government to allow foreign aid to reach cyclone victims.

Mathieson, David. 2009. "Burma: Surge in Political Prisoners." Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch. Available online: <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/09/15/burma-surge-political-prisoners>.

Annotation: The report reveals that there has been a more than 100 percent increase in the number of political prisoners in Burma over the last 2 years. Because freedom of expression and independent organizations are outlawed in Burma, there are some 2250 political prisoners in the country overall. The prisoners include monks, journalists, activists, and artists who have been imprisoned because of their participation in peaceful demonstrations in 2007 and for trying to ease the suffering wrought by Cyclone Nargis in 2008. The recent trial of Aung San Suu Kyi, who was sentenced to an additional eighteen months after an uninvited stranger intruded upon her property, is a case in point. HRW says she and other political prisoners must be released if Burma's 2010 elections are going to have any credibility. In the report, Human Rights Watch says that the United States, China, and Burma's other neighbors should pressure the Burmese government to release these prisoners as a central tenet of their relations with Burma.

Pedersen, M. B. 2007. *Promoting Human Rights in Burma: A Critique of Western Sanctions Policy*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Annotation: As one of the few foreign journalists living in Burma over the last decade, the author is able to provide an insightful look at the current situation in that nation. He details Burma's human rights abuses and current political situation. But his central argument is that Western policy has failed the Burmese people. He says that, despite producing no tangible results for over nineteen years, the West continues to pursue the same failed policies. Because of this, the Burmese government was recently able to strengthen its hold on power, while the political opposition in Burma has only gotten weaker. Meanwhile, poverty, HIV/AIDS, and human rights abuses are becoming even bigger problems. The author concludes by offering several possible solutions whereby the West can revise its approach and help alleviate the suffering of the Burmese people.

Petersen, H. D., L. Worm, M. Z. Olsen, B. Ussing, and O. J. Hartling. 2000. "Human rights violations in Burma/Myanmar. A two year follow-up examination." *Danish Medical Bulletin* 47 (5): 359.

Annotation: The authors investigated whether or not the human rights situation in Burma had improved in recent years. They did this by interviewing refugee members of a particular ethnic minority, the Mon people. The aim was to compare the refugees who fled recently with refugees who fled two to three years ago, in terms of both groups' exposure to human rights violations. This allowed the authors to evaluate whether or not the situation of Burmese ethnic minority groups has changed during the last few years. The authors conclude that human rights abuses in Burma are no less acute than in previous years. Further, they conclude that the Burmese military is directly responsible for all but a few of these shameful abuses.

Power, Samantha. 2007. "The Human-Rights Vacuum." *Time* (October 11). Available online: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1670504,00.html>.

Annotation: Power explains how the human rights situation in Burma has deteriorated in recent years. She blames, in part, the policies and actions of the United States. The US position in Burma and around the world has been weakened by its actions in Iraq as well as its policy of isolating Burma's government. As a result, China's influence has grown in Burma, and this development has coincided with a worsening human rights situation in that country. . In her short article, Power does not offer detailed solutions for policymakers. However, due to Power's reputation as an advocate for human rights, her article could inspire American scholars and policymakers to pay more attention to Burma's human rights problem.

Schairer-Vertannes, R. 2001. "Politics of Human Rights: How the World Has Failed Burma." *Asia Pacific Journal on Human Rights and the Law* 2 (1): 77-118.

Annotation: The author explores in detail the history of Burma, the current human rights situation, and the failures of the international community in addressing the problems in this country. Authoritarian military rule followed a coup that ended Burma's democratic experiment a decade and a half after it started. Ever since, the people of Burma have suffered at the hands of a repressive military junta. Nonviolent opposition to the junta is met with brutal violence. Free speech and other political rights do not exist. Tragically, this unfortunate situation has persisted for decades in the face of ineffectual efforts by the international community to halt the human rights abuses in Burma. The article, heavily footnoted and meant for an academic audience, is full of compelling and useful insights on the human rights situation in Burma.

Schmertz Jr., John R., and Mike Meier (eds.). 2007. "China and Russia veto U.S. measure in U.N. Security Council to deplore Burmese human rights abuses." *International Law Update* 13: 18.

Annotation: This brief article states that the United States led an effort in the United Nations to bring the international community together in opposition to the Burmese government's human rights abuses. However, China and Russia vetoed the UN resolution, blocking US-led efforts to hold Burma's military junta accountable. In vetoing the measure, China and Russia expressed their belief that the Burmese government's treatment of its own people is an internal matter over which the international community has no jurisdiction. China and Russia are staunch defenders of state sovereignty due to their fear that interventionist policies could be used to justify action within what they consider to be their own territory. The article reports the latest news on the human rights situation in Burma from a legal perspective, but it does not offer much in the way of political and economic analysis.

Seekins, Donald M. 2005. "Burma and U.S. Sanctions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime." *Asian Survey* 45 (3): 437-452.

Annotation: Seekins argues that current US policy—both sanctions and engagement—have failed. Rather than ignore Burma, he says the United States and the international community should work even harder to alleviate the suffering of the Burmese people. He says the world must provide the people with the humanitarian aid they urgently need—even if this temporarily bolsters the repressive military junta that is running the country. However, he indicates, this does not mean the United States and others should provide aid indiscriminately. Instead, the United States must help create a unified policy in the UN among all nations, wherein military aid to Burma is eliminated. The article is very useful for foreign policy academics and policymakers, and would appeal to anyone interested in this issue; however, it is somewhat vague on precise solutions.

Singer, P. W. 2005. *Children at War*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Annotation: The author explains how large numbers of children all over the world are forced participants in armed combat. Nearly a quarter of the almost 400 armed organizations in the world use children. Forced into combat through abduction and under the threat of death, some of these children are so young that they do not even know how old they are. This is happening in many nations in every part of the world. However, there are few countries with more child soldiers than Burma. Burma has 75,000 child soldiers, some as young as eleven years old. While many serve in rebel groups, the vast majority are forced into war by the repressive military junta that has governed Burma for decades. The author, writing in an accessible style that would appeal to anyone interested in this topic, does an excellent job informing the reader of this tragic problem plaguing the globe.

Steinberg, David I. 2005. "China's Burma Connection." *Brown Journal of World Affairs* 12 (2): 69.

Annotation: In this interview, Steinberg explains the extent of and motivation for China's relationship with Burma. He claims that the two countries maintain close contacts at the upper levels of government, and he reports that China has provided Burma with \$2 billion in military aid as well as helped train Burmese soldiers. He says that China is probably also the leading source of investment and trade in Burma, especially when taking into account significant unofficial exchanges. Partly due to its relationship with China, Burma has increased its foreign exchange holdings from \$30 million in 1988 to \$720 million in 2005. China's motivation for having close ties with Burma is China's need for energy—hydroelectric power, oil and gas, and minerals (nickel). Another reason for the close relationship, according to Steinberg, is the failure of US policy vis-a-vis Burma. He claims that US isolation of and sanctions against Burma have not only failed, but also have pushed Burma closer to China. The United States should engage Burma in talks and pressure them privately, because public pressure allows Burma's government to appeal to the country's nationalism.

The Economist. "No strings." 2008. *Economist* 386 (8571): 14-17.

Annotation: This article explains how the relationship between China and Burma benefits both countries. It says China gains from its access to Burma's energy supplies, while Burma

benefits from Chinese protection from international pressure to stop its human rights abuses, which the military junta relies upon to stay in power. The article states that China has a close partnership with only those nations that are ostracized by the rest of the international community. Moreover, Burma is able to successfully resist international human rights norms thanks to Chinese support. Although it does not offer many solutions, the article does a great job of explaining and assessing the background and current issues involved with Chinese support for Burma's government.

Walmsley, R. 2003. "World Prison Population List." King's College London – School of Law. Available online: http://kcl.ac.uk/depsta/law/research/icps/downloads/wppl-8th_41.pdf.

Annotation: The World Prison Population List, published by King's College London's International Centre for Prison Studies, reveals that over 9.8 million people are incarcerated throughout the world. Moreover, the rate of imprisonment in the world is growing; the current world prison population rate is 145 per 100,000. With 65,063 people in prison, Burma ranks 126th in the world in terms of prison population rate. As many of those imprisoned are political prisoners of Burma's repressive military junta, these numbers are a testament to the poor human rights situation in Burma.

Webb, Jim. 2009. "We Can't Afford to Ignore Myanmar." *New York Times* (August 25). Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/26/opinion/26webb.html?pagewanted=1&r=1>.

Annotation: In this op-ed piece, Senator Jim Webb of Virginia gives an account of his August 2009 visit to Myanmar, the first by an American political leader in ten years. He says that the West's decade-long sanctions against Myanmar, while motivated by commendable intentions, have merely served to hurt ordinary citizens while strengthening their oppressive government's hold on power. This is partly because China has not joined the sanctions and instead has taken the opportunity to expand its influence in Myanmar. He says that continuing to isolate Myanmar's dictators would be to delude ourselves that we are helping the citizens of that nation. Instead, we should engage—and convince China to act more responsibly in its relationship with—Myanmar's dictators. According to Webb, this is the best way to bring Myanmar into the community of responsible nations.