

10

US–Burma relations: Told you so

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After Aung San Suu Kyi allowed an uninvited American visitor to stay at her home for a couple of days, and did not report his presence, Myanmar’s military government announced that she would be prosecuted for violating the conditions of her house arrest. This made it impossible for president Obama to relax US sanctions against the regime, for the time being at least.

President Obama has just renewed US sanctions against Burma.¹ This follows a strong statement by Secretary of State Clinton condemning the military regime for its latest moves against Aung San Suu Kyi (that is, sending her to trial for breaking the conditions of her house arrest, after receiving an uninvited visitor).²

In my last Lowy blog post, I said that, if the regime did not change its behaviour and there was another incident in which it demonstrated its contempt for human rights and international concerns, it would undercut Obama’s moves to review US policy towards Burma and strengthen the hand of those wanting to keep the hard line pursued by the Bush White House.³

1 Demetri Sevastopulo, ‘Obama Renews Sanctions Against Burma’, *Financial Times*, [London], 16 May 2009, www.ft.com/content/60cce76e-41a1-11de-bdb7-00144feabdc0.

2 ‘Clinton Joins in Condemnation of “Baseless Charges”’, *Brisbane Times*, 16 May 2009, www.brisbanetimes.com.au/world/clinton-joins-in-condemnation-of-baseless-charges-20090515-b63g.html.

3 Andrew Selth, ‘US–Burma: Where to From Here?’, *The Interpreter*, 28 April 2009, archive.lowy.institute.org/the-interpreter/us-burma-where-here.

US sanctions were due for formal renewal this month. In the circumstances, Obama had no choice but to extend them for another year. Once again, the regime has shot itself in the foot, by making it politically impossible for the US (or any other country) to reconsider sanctions and other punitive policies (which they have acknowledged are achieving very little).

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