

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT  
Online Event

## **“Towards Durable Solutions: Addressing Humanitarian Challenges in Bangladesh and Myanmar”**

### **Opening Remarks by Representative Steve Chabot**

DATE  
**Wednesday, January 12, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. ET**

FEATURING  
**Representative Steve Chabot (R-OH)**  
*Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia, and Nonproliferation*

CSIS EXPERTS  
**Jacob Kurtzer**  
*Director and Senior Fellow, Humanitarian Agenda, CSIS*

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Jacob Kurtzer: Welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies. My name is Jacob Kurtzer. I'm the Director and Senior Fellow of the Humanitarian Agenda at CSIS.

We're very grateful for your joining us today for this important conversation on The Path Towards Durable Solutions in Myanmar. It's been one year since, or nearly one year, since the military coup in Myanmar overthrew a democratically elected government, and a number of years since the crisis for the Rohingya in Rakhine state.

And today's conversation is about what we can do as a community to achieve durable solutions for both the humanitarian and human-rights challenges inside Myanmar and in its neighboring Bangladesh. We're very grateful as well for our esteemed panelists joining us today.

To start our event off today, we have Congressman Steve Chabot, and we're very grateful for your joining us, Congressman.

Congressman Chabot has been – is the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia, the Pacific, Central Asia and Nonproliferation. In his over 24 years in Congress, Congressman Chabot has visited Burma twice and has been a longtime champion of the Burmese people. And we're very grateful for your joining us today.

Congressman Chabot, over to you.

Representative Steve Chabot: Thank you very much, and I want to thank CSIS for having this discussion on the humanitarian crisis in Burma or Myanmar. I'll be referring to it as Burma.

As a longtime member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and now the ranking member of the Asia Pacific Subcommittee, I've made Burma a particular focus over a number of years. As everyone participating here, I'm sure, knows, Burma is facing two principal ongoing crises – a political crisis following the coup and a humanitarian one as well.

These crises are inseparably linked, and both are a direct result of the Burmese military's brutal resolve to stay in power, whatever the costs to the country, whatever the costs to the people of Burma.

In terms of the humanitarian situation, the problems facing Burma are, let's face it, daunting. And thanks to the coup, they have gotten exponentially worse as the situation continues to deteriorate. The Tatmadaw's ongoing atrocities, both before and after the coup, continues to displace more and

more people, while its insistence on maintaining control has put it in direct opposition to the population at large, leading in turn to the disintegration of normal life.

The violence has driven 30,000 Chin into India. Thousands of other minorities have fled into other countries; Thailand, for example. Institutions have broken down as the military's stranglehold on power leads citizens, especially doctors, to boycott large swaths of the economy in protest. And it's gotten so bad that the UN Global Humanitarian Overview reports that a 14-fold increase in those needing humanitarian assistance, from 1 million people to over 14 million people, which is more people than live in my home state of Ohio.

Further, the Rohingya genocide resulted in over 800,000 desperate people fleeing to Bangladesh and thousands into refugee camps within Burma. And although Bangladesh has garnered a lot of goodwill for its response, and rightfully so, there are areas where that response, let's face it, leaves much to be desired, particularly recently.

Going forward, the international community must look for a long-term, appropriate resolution to the plight of the Rohingya. The camps around Cox's Bazar cannot be considered a permanent solution.

This brings us back to the Burmese military. They are directly responsible for the genocide against the Rohingya and the fact that hundreds of thousands of people are unable to return to Burma. The Tatmadaw has also waged a seemingly endless conflict with Burma's various ethnic minority groups. And it's believed that the junta is responsible for the slaughter of over 1,400 men, women, and children since the coup. And add to that the horrific slaughter on Christmas Eve in a predominantly Christian area of 35 people, including two Save the Children workers, to put it bluntly the military's actions are making Burma essentially unlivable.

Since the humanitarian and political crises are intertwined, they must be addressed in tandem. Thus, I would urge the Biden administration to step up its efforts to get the international community more engaged with regard to Burma. As Burma slides towards an all-out civil war, a concerted push now might just make a difference.

We should push for the UN to impose an arms embargo on the junta so that it has fewer weapons to murder its own people. And we should support at least those ASEAN nations who have been willing to take a firm stand against the Tatmadaw police state that has replaced a once-possible building democracy. This is especially urgent in light of Prime Minister Hun Sen's ill-advised visit to Burma last weekend that did nothing to resolve the

crisis while at the same time, unfortunately, to some degree legitimizing the junta.

As for Congress, we should immediately pass the BURMA Act. Congressman – I should say former Congressman Eliot Engel and I first introduced this bipartisan legislation in 2017 as the genocide unfolded. Last year, Chairman Meeks and I updated the bill to address the coup. The bill sanctions the financial interests of the junta, provides mechanisms to promote accountability for the genocide, and authorizes assistance for humanitarian purposes. Passing the BURMA Act would go a long way towards demonstrating that the United States is committed to holding the Tatmadaw accountable and focused on seeing the situation resolved in the best interest of the people of Burma.

Again, I want to thank you for asking me to participate in this important forum this morning. Unfortunately, as I mentioned, I have additional responsibilities with respect to Congress, so I may not be able to stay on much longer. But I do appreciate, you know, the invitation. And as we say here in Congress, I yield back.