

House to pass legislation that I authored to call these atrocities what they were—genocide.

It is extremely frustrating that, after 2 years, the Burmese military has faced very few consequences for these crimes.

That is why we must pass the BURMA Act today. It would provide needed tools to ensure greater accountability on the Burmese military for these atrocities.

Lastly, I would like to address any concern that if we, the United States, stand up for human rights in Asia, dictators will go scurrying, go running to China. This entirely misses the point.

Our competition with China is over whose values will shape the world. If we have to look the other way on genocide, China has already won.

It is well past time that the BURMA Act became law, either this version or the version that this House passed under the NDAA. Either version is very good.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support them, and we hope that it is done in a very timely manner. I support passage of this legislation.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCUAUL. Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to close.

Mr. Speaker, America's first responders represent to the world the humanity at the heart of our Nation.

I, again, thank the gentleman from Ohio (Mr. CHABOT) for his expression of support for their overseas activities, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume for purposes of closing.

Mr. Speaker, the First Responders Passport Act is a good measure that passed the House in the 114th Congress. I am glad we are considering it again today.

This is a straightforward and commonsense measure to make sure we can rapidly deploy American search and rescue teams to other countries when disaster strikes.

I urge all Members to join me in supporting this measure, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 2229, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

SOUTHEAST ASIA STRATEGY ACT

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 1632) to require a strategy for engagement with Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 1632

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Southeast Asia Strategy Act".

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress finds the following:

(1) Southeast Asia is the fulcrum of the Indo-Pacific region, providing both a geographic and maritime link between East and South Asia.

(2) The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a regional intergovernmental organization, remains central to the Indo-Pacific region's institutional architecture and to United States foreign policy toward the region.

(3) The United States has reaffirmed that the security and sovereignty of its Southeast Asian allies and partners, including a strong, independent ASEAN, remain vital to the security, prosperity, and stability of the Indo-Pacific region.

(4) The United States has committed to continuing to deepen longstanding alliances and partnerships with a range of Southeast Asian nations, including by promoting our shared values, democracy, human rights, and civil society.

(5) Since the end of the Second World War, United States investments in strengthening alliances and partnerships with Southeast Asian nations have yielded tremendous returns for United States interests, as working with and through these alliances and partnerships have increased the region's capacity and capability to address common challenges.

(6) ASEAN member states are critical United States security partners in preventing violent extremism and protecting the freedom and openness of the maritime domain and in preventing the trafficking of weapons of mass destruction.

(7) ASEAN member states have contributed significantly to regional disaster monitoring and management and emergency response through initiatives such as the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management, an inter-governmental organization that facilitates coordination and cooperation among ASEAN member states and international organizations in times of emergency.

(8) According to the 2018 ASEAN Business Outlook Survey, ASEAN member states are vital to the prosperity of the United States economy and exports to ASEAN economies support more than 500,000 jobs in the United States.

(9) The United States and ASEAN have recently celebrated the 40th anniversary of their ties and established a new strategic partnership that will enhance cooperation across the economic, political-security, and people-to-people pillars of the relationship.

SEC. 3. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It is the policy of the United States to—

(1) deepen cooperation with ASEAN and ASEAN member states in the interest of promoting peace, security, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region;

(2) affirm the importance of ASEAN centrality and ASEAN-led mechanisms in the evolving institutional architecture of the Indo-Pacific region; and

(3) establish and communicate a comprehensive strategy toward the Indo-Pacific region that articulates—

(A) the role and importance of Southeast Asia to the United States;

(B) the value of the United States-ASEAN relationship;

(C) the mutual interests of all parties;

(D) the concrete and material benefits all nations derive from strong United States engagement and leadership in Southeast Asia; and

(E) efforts to forge and maintain ASEAN consensus, especially on key issues of political and security concern to the region, such as the South China Sea.

SEC. 4. STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH SOUTHEAST ASIA AND ASEAN.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State, in consultation with the heads of other Federal departments and agencies as appropriate, shall develop and submit to the appropriate congressional committees a comprehensive strategy for engagement with Southeast Asia and ASEAN.

(b) MATTERS TO BE INCLUDED.—The strategy required by subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) A statement of enduring United States interests in Southeast Asia and a description of efforts to bolster the effectiveness of ASEAN.

(2) A description of efforts to—

(A) deepen and expand Southeast Asian alliances, partnerships, and multilateral engagements, including efforts to expand broad based and inclusive economic growth, security ties, security cooperation and interoperability, economic connectivity, and expand opportunities for ASEAN to work with other like-minded partners in the region; and

(B) encourage like-minded partners outside of the Indo-Pacific region to engage with ASEAN.

(3) A summary of initiatives across the whole of the United States Government to strengthen the United States partnership with Southeast Asian nations and ASEAN, including to promote broad based and inclusive economic growth, trade, investment, energy and efforts to combat climate change, public-private partnerships, physical and digital infrastructure development, education, disaster management, public health and economic and political diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

(4) A summary of initiatives across the whole of the United States Government to enhance the capacity of Southeast Asian nations with respect to enforcing international law and multilateral sanctions, and initiatives to cooperate with ASEAN as an institution in these areas.

(5) A summary of initiatives across the whole of the United States Government to promote human rights and democracy, to strengthen the rule of law, civil society, and transparent governance, and to protect the integrity of elections from outside influence.

(6) A summary of initiatives to promote security cooperation and security assistance within Southeast Asian nations, including—

(A) maritime security and maritime domain awareness initiatives for protecting the maritime commons and supporting international law and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea; and

(B) efforts to combat terrorism, human trafficking, piracy, and illegal fishing, and promote more open, reliable routes for sea lines of communication.

(c) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES DEFINED.—In this section, the term "appropriate congressional committees" means—

(1) the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives; and

(2) the Committee on Foreign Relations and the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. McCaul) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include in the RECORD extraneous material on H.R. 1632.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me start by thanking the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. WAGNER), the gentleman from Texas (Mr. CASTRO), and the gentleman from Florida (Mr. YOHO) for introducing this legislation.

Southeast Asian states and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, or ASEAN, have been central to American policy in Asia for decades. They are key partners in advancing our interests in the Indo-Pacific.

But at this point, the Trump administration still hasn't put together a comprehensive strategy on how to strengthen our engagement with these countries. This legislation would require such a strategy.

It calls on the Secretary of State, working with the Secretaries of Defense and Commerce, to come up with a plan that will make sure the United States and our partners are working together on some of the most critical issues we are facing, from climate change and human rights to security cooperation, energy, and a growing global economy.

A multiyear strategy for our engagement with ASEAN and its member states will help us build partnerships in the region focused on short-term challenges, as well as longer term opportunities. Many Southeast Asian countries face the same global challenges that we do, like terrorism and human trafficking. The United States can and should be their preferred partner to address these issues.

This bill will help us take stock of our ongoing and planned efforts in these areas and determine what strategic personnel and funding resources are necessary to make these efforts successful.

Mr. Speaker, this is a good, straightforward piece of legislation. I am glad the House is considering it today, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. McCaul. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of Congresswoman WAGNER's Southeast Asia Strategy Act.

This bill will promote U.S. cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and establish a comprehensive interagency strategy for engagement in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN is the center of Asia's strategic and economic future and critical to the administration's Indo-Pacific strategy. Southeast Asia has been a critical global crossroads for hundreds of years, and it is growing even more important in the 21st century. Trillions in trade pass through regional seaways, including vital energy supplies for U.S. allies and adversaries.

China's territorial aggression in the South China Sea and its predatory Belt and Road Initiative are central to the region's geopolitics. Southeast Asia's rising economies are becoming important drivers of regional growth as its developed economies begin to slow.

The Southeast Asia Strategy Act is a welcome step to ensure that this critical region receives the interagency focus that it deserves and that it requires.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, I urge my colleagues to support this measure, and I reserve the balance of my time.

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Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. McCaul. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. WAGNER), the vice ranking member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the author of the Southeast Asia Strategy Act.

Mrs. WAGNER. Mr. Speaker, I thank the ranking member, Mr. McCaul, for yielding to me and for his strong support on this piece of legislation, along with the chairman of the full committee, Mr. ENGEL, for bringing H.R. 1632, the Southeast Asia Strategy Act, to a vote.

I also thank Congressman CASTRO for his persistent support of U.S.-ASEAN relations, and I urge my colleagues to join us in passing this important, straightforward, and commonsense piece of legislation.

Southeast Asia is of deep strategic and economic importance to the United States, and its global influence is, in fact, growing.

In 2015, the United States and ASEAN elevated our relationship into a strategic partnership. To fully realize this partnership, the U.S. needs a proactive, coherent regional strategy that addresses all aspects of the relationship, from trade and humanitarian goals to diplomatic and security arrangements.

The Southeast Asia Strategy Act ensures that it is the policy of the United States to coordinate with ASEAN and its member states in the interest of promoting peace, security, and stability.

The legislation instructs the Secretary of State to develop a comprehensive strategy for engagement with the region, including information on alliances and partnerships, investment, development, security cooperation, energy security, human rights, and capacity building on enforcing

international law and sanctions and creating more open, reliable routes for trade.

I have had many opportunities to meet with ASEAN officials and foreign ministers, and one message I hear repeatedly is that the United States must demonstrate strength and leadership.

Congress should listen closely to our allies demanding stronger leadership, and not just because China would be sure to fill any vacuum in power.

ASEAN is a powerhouse and an end in itself, and this bill will ensure that U.S.-ASEAN engagement becomes ever more fruitful.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the Southeast Asia Strategy Act.

Mr. McCaul. Mr. Speaker, in closing, I would like to thank Congresswoman WAGNER, the vice ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee, for introducing the Southeast Asia Strategy Act.

The administration's national security strategy has recommitted the United States to great power competition, and the People's Republic of China is our primary strategic competitor.

The Indo-Pacific region is at the center of this competition, and Southeast Asia is at the center of the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons, I urge my colleagues to support the bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume for the purpose of closing.

Mr. Speaker, let me first thank my colleagues who have taken part in this debate. I thank the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. WAGNER) and the ranking member, Mr. McCaul, for their leadership in this area.

I want to just close by being clear with ourselves as a Congress, as the United States of America. If we are not engaged in the Indo-Pacific region, if we are not building bridges of friendship and cooperation, if we are not bringing American leadership and American values to this critical part of the world, who is going to fill the void? The answer is easy. It is China.

We can't be muddling our way through when it comes to our policy. We need a smart, proactive approach that meets current challenges and builds the framework for successful, long-term engagement.

Mr. Speaker, this bill will help us meet those goals. I am pleased to support it. I urge all Members to do the same, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1632, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

BURMA POLITICAL PRISONERS ASSISTANCE ACT

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 2327) to direct the Secretary of State to provide assistance to civil society organizations in Burma that work to secure the release of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Burma, and assistance to current and former prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Burma, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read the title of the bill. The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 2327

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the “Burma Political Prisoners Assistance Act”.

SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

Congress makes the following findings:

(1) Aung San Suu Kyi and the National League for Democracy (NLD) pledged that they “would not arrest anyone as political prisoners”, but have failed to fulfill this promise since they took control of Burma’s Union Parliament and the Government’s executive branch in April 2016.

(2) As of the end of April 2019, there were 331 political prisoners in Burma, 48 of them serving sentences, 90 awaiting trial inside prison, and 193 awaiting trial outside prison, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners in Burma.

(3) During its three years in power, the NLD Government has provided pardons for Burma’s political prisoners on six occasions. State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi took steps to secure the release of nearly 235 political prisoners in April 2016. On May 23, 2017, former President Htin Kyaw granted pardons to 259 prisoners, including 89 political prisoners. On April 17, 2018, current President Win Myint pardoned 8,541 prisoners, including 36 political prisoners. In April and May 2019, he pardoned more than 23,000 prisoners, including 20 political prisoners.

(4) The Burmese security forces have used colonial-era laws to arrest and charge political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. These laws include but are not limited to provisions of the Penal Code, the Peaceful Assembly and Peaceful Procession Act, the 1908 Unlawful Associations Act, the 2013 Telecommunications Act, and the 1923 Official Secrets Act.

(5) On December 12, 2017, Reuters reporters Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were arrested and charged with violating the Official Secrets Act, continuing a trend of restricting media and free speech and attempting to thwart coverage of the events in Rakhine State.

(6) On September 3, 2018, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison. Time Magazine included pictures of the two reporters on the cover of its “Person of the Year” issue on December 10, 2018, as two of the “Guardians and the War on Truth”.

(7) On May 6, 2019, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo were released after more than 500 days behind bars.

(8) According to Burmese free speech organization Athan, 44 journalists and 142 activists since 2016 were charged with colonial-era laws used to stifle dissent and restrict activist groups and have faced trial.

(9) Since December 2018, three Kachin activists were sentenced to six months in prison in connection with peaceful antiwar protests; a protester demonstrating against the Myitsone Dam (a controversial Chinese-backed hydropower project) was charged for peaceful demonstrations, and police used excessive force to crack down on peaceful protesters in Kayah State, with some of the demonstrators charged under vaguely worded, repressive laws.

(10) On August 18, 2017, Aung Ko Htwe was arrested because he gave a media interview in which he described his experience as a child soldier, including how the Burmese military abducted and forcibly recruited him when he was 13 years old. He was charged under Section 505(b) of Burma’s Penal Code.

(11) Although former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson took Burma off the State Department’s list of the worst offenders in the use of child soldiers in 2017, the Department reinstated Burma to the list in 2018. According to the United Nations, the Burmese military and ethnic guerrilla groups remain “persistent perpetrators” in the recruitment and use of children in [Burma].”.

SEC. 3. CHILD SOLDIERS.

It is the sense of Congress that no one should be jailed for freely expressing him or herself or for speaking against the use of child soldiers.

SEC. 4. PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY.

It is the sense of Congress that Burma must immediately drop defamation charges against the three Kachin activists, Lum Zawng, Nang Pu, and Zau Jet, who led a peaceful rally in Myitkyina, the capital of Kachin State in April 2018, and that the prosecution of Lum Zawng, Nang Pu, and Zau Jet is an attempt by the Burmese authorities to intimidate, harass, and silence community leaders and human rights defenders who speak out about military abuses and the impact on civilian populations.

SEC. 5. PRESS FREEDOM.

It is the sense of Congress that press freedom is a fundamental human right and should be upheld and protected in Burma and everywhere, and that Burmese authorities must immediately cease the arbitrary arrest, detention, imprisonment, and physical attacks of journalists, which have created a climate of fear and self-censorship among local journalists.

SEC. 6. STATEMENT OF POLICY.

It is the policy of the United States that—

(1) all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Burma should be unconditionally and immediately released;

(2) the Administration and the Department of State should use all of their diplomatic tools to ensure that all prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Burma are released; and

(3) the Burmese Government should repeal or amend all laws that violate the rights to freedom of expression, peaceful assembly, or association, and ensure that laws such as the Telecommunications Law of 2013 and the Unlawful Associations Act of 1908, and laws relating to the right to peaceful assembly, all comply with international human rights standards.

SEC. 7. POLITICAL PRISONERS ASSISTANCE.

The Secretary of State shall continue to provide assistance to civil society organizations in Burma that work to secure the release of prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Burma, and assistance to current and former prisoners of conscience and political prisoners in Burma. Such assistance may include the following:

(1) Support for the documentation of human rights violations with respect to prisoners of conscience and political prisoners.

(2) Support for advocacy in Burma to raise awareness of issues relating to prisoners of conscience and political prisoners.

(3) Support for efforts to repeal or amend laws that are used to imprison individuals as either prisoners of conscience or political prisoners.

(4) Support for health, including mental health, and post-incarceration assistance in gaining access to education and employment opportunities or other forms of reparation to enable former prisoners of conscience and political prisoners to resume a normal life.

(5) The creation, in consultation with former political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, their families, and representatives, of an independent prisoner review mechanism in Burma to review the cases of individuals who may have been charged or deprived of their liberty for peacefully exercising their human rights, review all laws used to arrest, prosecute, and punish individuals as political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, and provide recommendations to the Burmese Government for the repeal or amendment of all such laws.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. LEVIN) and the gentleman from Texas (Mr. McCaul) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Michigan.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include in the RECORD extraneous material on H.R. 2327.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Michigan?

There was no objection.

Mr. LEVIN of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of my bill, the Burma Political Prisoners Assistance Act.

Next week, I will travel to Bangladesh, where I am going to spend time in Cox’s Bazar, the site of the world’s largest refugee settlement. Since August of 2017, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees have fled to Cox’s Bazar from Burma, where villages were burned to the ground, women and girls were raped, and many were massacred at the hands of Burmese security forces as part of a campaign that can only be described as genocide.

When I come home to the United States, I plan to speak openly and honestly about what I saw and share the stories of Rohingya refugees I talk to. And, while I don’t expect everyone to like what I have to say, I know that, here in America, I won’t be persecuted for exercising my right to free speech and sharing an honest account of the atrocities so many have experienced in Burma.

But, if Burma was my home country, I would not be able to rest so easy, no matter my ethnic group or religion. That is because colonial-era laws are used to stifle dissent and imprison people who dare to speak out or work to protect human rights.